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# THE RAPE OF CINDERELLA:

## *Essays in Literary Continuity*

# THE RAPE OF

*Essays in*



*Eugene Paul Nassar*

# CINDERELLA:

## *Literary Continuity*

*Indiana University Press*

BLOOMINGTON / LONDON

188707

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*Published in Canada by Fitzhenry & Whiteside Limited, Don Mills, Ontario*

*Library of Congress catalog card number:* 72-108215

*ISBN:* 253-12350-x

*Manufactured in the United States of America*

T O

*Professor Otton Martin Nikodým*

AND HIS WIFE

*Stanislawa Nikodým*

WITH AFFECTION AND GRATITUDE

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# *Preface*

These essays in and on criticism are intended to influence some young readers, critics, and writers who are in the process of formulating their own ideas about literature. Most of them were written for this book; the two of them that were not (chapters Three and Four) have of course been revised for the book, and in any case revolve around the idea of continuity that has interested me in the years covered by these essays. The idea, simply stated, is that stability or consistency of posture, attitude, or approach is the fundamental demand a reader makes upon the artist. The essays attempt what this writer considers then the first, the fundamental critical act: the probing for and the articulating of the unique and complex body of attitudes (what I call in this book the "tone" and what is often called the "vision") that impel and shape a work or body of work, and an evaluation

of the continuity or consistency of these central attitudes. It is the feeling of this writer that upon the accuracy of this articulation of response depends the validity of all other statements about the given works of art—which seems to me to be no more than serious common sense.

The structure of the book, the order of the essays, is not very rigidly determined. Chapter One is rather a tease, sketching out the critical approach, and is followed by four essays on poems from different periods, three on novels, and one on the drama of Shakespeare, so as to illustrate my approach to criticism with at least an appearance of range. The last two chapters of the first part restate the book's approach in a somewhat more detailed fashion after, hopefully, the reader may have found the critical essays persuasive. And then, in the second part of the book, the hope is to gain the still-doubtful reader's respect for the approach by a longer, full-dress analysis of Hart Crane's *The Bridge* and the critical literature on that poem.

Each essay of Part One should have been handled like the Crane study if it were to pretend to a complete handling of its subject. Each essay of Part One is an attempt rather to stimulate the reader to consider the importance of the point from which criticism starts, not the elaborate salon where it usually ends. Perhaps the reader will excuse a certain amount of repetition, as it is not to be expected that all readers will read all the essays. The prose style of these essays is perhaps influenced at times by Randall Jarrell's *Poetry and the Age*. And the title, if rather embarrassingly sensational, does dramatize the book's main idea.

It is impossible, if one reads a good deal of criticism, literary theory, or aesthetics, to be much more than derivative in the formulation of a critical approach; but the approach of this book is, while ancient in the main, sufficiently disregarded in much of what is called criticism to warrant its continual reformulation. I hope that there are insights enough into the particular literary works covered to excuse the ambitious critical talk in this preface

and throughout the book. Chapters One and Four have appeared in *Renascence*, and a portion of the Crane essay in *Essays in Criticism*. I must thank the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities for a grant that enabled me to write the Crane essay. Mrs. Myrna Schaub has been typing drafts of this book with good humor and understanding. Mrs. Dorothy Wikelund at the Indiana University Press has been a patient and helpful editor. Professor James Gindin read the entire manuscript with care, and helped mightily with his insight and sympathy.

The young student learns of critical approaches from books, but he is inspired by his teachers to try to be intelligent about what he loves. I have been inspired by some of the best teachers of literature—Charles Coffin, John Crowe Ransom, and Denham Sutcliffe at Kenyon College; Christopher Ricks at Worcester College, Oxford; Robert Adams, Arthur Mizener, and Stephen Whicher at Cornell University—and by many others in other disciplines. I am grateful to all of them. I dedicate these essays humbly to one of them, who, together with his wife, gave me so much more than merely the leading idea of this book.

EUGENE PAUL NASSAR

*Utica, New York*
*1969*

# *Acknowledgments*

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# THE RAPE OF CINDERELLA:

## *Essays in Literary Continuity*

# PART I

## *Continuity*

# 1

# The Rape of Cinderella

THE THOUGHT CAME (a hoary one, but new for me at the time) as I sat uncomfortably in a drafty hall as an undergraduate at Kenyon College in the early part of 1958 watching a movie (which I don't remember very well any more), *La Symphonie Pastorale* (from Gide's novella). I remember I felt the screen writer had led the viewer (me) to expect a certain mode of behavior in an aging minister, and then thwarted those expectations by having the minister violate his ward, a young blind girl. Waves of anger, frustration, and self-doubt ran through me: "Somebody will surely say it is because I'm sentimental about old people, or about sex, or religion, that I did not understand a subtle rendering of the fallen nature of man."

But (I thought then) could I not blame my reaction on the film makers? Did the idea of an old man, even a kindly old

minister, seducing a girl really bother me or shock me at all? Could I not enter, and was I not entering every day, into all sorts of imaginative worlds, built on different assessments of value from those in my own small world? Was it not that by the effects of action and characterization the movie had created a world where what happened couldn't or shouldn't happen, where the viewer had been manipulated rather than persuaded?

Suppose (I thought) we were reading Grimm's *Cinderella* and found on the last page that Prince Charming raped the heroine? Any reader of any time or place would be shocked, and it would have nothing to do with the values or beliefs of that man, that time, that place, or with the fact that princes more often rape servant girls than marry them.

I remember that when the lights were switched on I turned in the wooden folding chair to a friend, a great professor of mathematics, and looked at him for his reactions. He shrugged his shoulders and said simply, "discontinuous." Which is just about what I was thinking, though maybe we had different ideas about the meaning of the word.

I remember too that we were all reading Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*—which was just out—a work of obvious brilliance, but one with some particularly provoking (and amusing) passages in the first chapter. Analysis of literary works for the purpose of classification, it was asserted there, was meaningful; value judgments about those works were simple exercises in fluctuating tastes and shifting sentiments, and so were not legitimate aspects of the business of criticism.

I went back to Frye's "Polemical Introduction" after the movie and formulated something like this in my mind, being rather unfair to Frye: "Evaluation of a work is far from meaningless to criticism—it is the very heart of the process, because it is the very demand the artist makes on us: 'I will create a world,' he says, 'of a certain complex tonality, and I will convince you, while you are reading my work, of the existence of that world,

no matter what your life is like. If I do not do this, I have done nothing that I wanted to do.' If we do not evaluate, pass judgment upon, how successfully a writer maintains the illusion of his created world, then we are not critics, we are merely students.

"But, it is true, we are not evaluating one man's assessment of life with respect to our own (that is metacriticism, a part of philosophy, in particular of ethics or value theory), but rather evaluating to what degree the author has been successful in developing and maintaining his *tone*, that unique and complex set of attitudes he began with and builds upon.

"Our initial demand of a literary work is consistency of tone, or continuity, and the most undesirable effect in a literary work is that of aesthetic 'shock,' which is the sensitive reader's response to a break in tonality."

Since that time I have found that the simple position outlined above (a position as old as Aristotle though constantly undergoing reformulation)[1] was capable of extension and ramification which allowed me to articulate some critical judgments based on reactions which I feel the work itself provoked.

Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, for instance, seems to suffer a serious break in tone in the fifth and last book, where Chaucer switches his mode of treating the narrative. In the first four books we are presented with an elaborate internal analysis of motives in the love affair of Troilus and Criseyde, slowly paced, with a full rendering of all the fluctuations of mood of two people predisposed to come together and trying to play a love game by rules. Criseyde's unfaithfulness, however, is reported in but five stanzas, Chaucer assumes the role of a mere copyist of sources, throwing up his hands at an event he cannot explain but must accept as fact. It is not Criseyde's succumbing to Diomede's advances that shocks, it is the summary fashion in which it happens—a matter of a switching of attitude, pace, and narrative perspective. Criseyde's terrible letter at the end—where she accuses Troilus

of infidelity—is similarly thrust upon the reader without preparing him for the psychological change in Criseyde, in a work where psychological mood had been constantly probed.

It seems to me then that all the careful (and conflicting) analyses by the critics as to why Criseyde fell (C. S. Lewis' in *The Allegory of Love* is persuasive) are not really to the point. By Chaucer's mode in the first four books of *Troilus* we were promised this explanation and we did not get it. The probable reason is the author's impulse to make a philosophic point—that the world is fickle and that we must ultimately renounce it—conquered the desire to carry on the narrative in the mode in which it had been cast.[2]

A character does not necessarily have to be consistently drawn if the tone (the artist's attitude toward his material) does not require it. Swift's Gulliver, for instance, is a character of no consistency, but is a name for several foils for various satiric thrusts by Swift. One is not shocked when Gulliver is at different times wise man or fool, cynic or patriot, acute, obtuse, credulous, sly, benevolent, or misanthropic, because the author's eye and the reader's attention are not on Gulliver but on the personages that are reacting to the protean hero.

The inconsistencies in Fielding's hero Tom Jones are more damaging to the tone of the book than those in Gulliver, though less damaging than the change in Criseyde. Fielding, like Swift, is interested in the whole social organism and in presenting a view of life rather than in rendering characters of psychological depth and roundness. But so successful is he in drawing the surfaces of life that characters which were never intended to be more than types capture our imagination. And so we experience (perhaps) mild shocks when we compare Jones' sometime moral obtuseness with his usual moral sensitivity, Squire Western's brutal unconcern (which is absolute) for his daughter with his love for her, the narrator's frequent deterministic metaphors with his strong moral and social concerns. These inconsistencies are

not fatal because there is a pervasive tone of irony, a complex irony including self-irony, which casts a shade of philosophic and psychological uncertainty over a book that on the surface seems to comprise attitudes of simple certainty. The focus is not on the characters but on Fielding's ambivalent attitudes. This more complex tone, which I think is the true tone of the book, provides the continuity beneath Fielding's constant manipulation of his characters.[3]

I remember reading fairly close together Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?* and Robert Penn Warren's *All The King's Men,* and being struck by the similarity of one central situation in both—the moments in each where the young narrators are told by the women they will end up with that they have had affairs with those anti-heroes who dominate the books. It seemed to me then (as it seems now) that Ann Stanton's behavior was integral, while Kit Sargent's rendered her unfit for at least one of the roles Schulberg had prepared for her. Jack Burden, the narrator in *All The King's Men,* suffers from various sorts of inadequacies, frustrations, and hesitations which are fundamental faults of character, and Willie Stark has much that is fundamentally attractive in his makeup. Al Manheim, the narrator in Schulberg's book, however, has no fundamental faults, only superficial ones. He sleeps with women—but never hurts them—drinks, hasn't found himself—yet has a moral earnestness and compassion for others, especially for the beat and downtrodden. One of these is the easily accessible lady, Billie Rand. Her reactions to sex, people, and to Sammy Glick set the moral tone for the whole book. Billie, in bed with Al, offers the observation that she'd hate to go to bed with Sammy, because "even if he didn't pay me, I'd feel like I was doing it for money." Kit, the talented, ambitious, Vassar girl, however, *has* gone to bed with Glick. Al, who is falling in love with Kit, cannot help asking her about her relations with Sammy:

"Okay, pal," she said. "But don't blame me if it makes you sore. As you probably guessed, our little corporal is pretty damn good in bed. Sex hasn't much to do with friendship or love or any other of those virtuous relationships. Most people know that but they don't like to admit it."

Schulberg has tried to prepare us for this moment, but failed. We know and Al knows she has been staying with Sammy, we know and Al knows that Kit is tough and schooled in unsentimentality. What still remains is that in Billie's terms (which are so obviously Al's terms, and, irresistibly, our terms), Kit has little restraint, none of Billie's instinctive fastidiousness or moral selectivity. The author himself, by his creation of an appealing moral attitude, has made it impossible for the reader to like Kit. Hence one can never quite believe in the later love match of Al and Kit, he seems to be so much the better person.

This impression is probably not what Schulberg intended. It appears that Schulberg, in wanting to represent various aspects of a flawed America, has given us a flawed Kit. But while something can be done about the flawed societies, there is nothing to be done for a character who has sinned against the created moral tone of a book.

The impulse to make some sort of large statement, using the actions of a character who is unsuited to bear the burden, is a common cause for an author's breaking the illusions of reality he has created. We all have compulsions to preach about experience. It is maintainence of the illusion of a rendered reality that is the artist's job. In the composed work (and perhaps in life too) it is not a man's "truth" that matters so much, as the quality and the continuity of his illusion.

The remarks above deal with "continuity" rather straightforwardly: the author, for some reason or other, breaks his tone by various rapes perpetrated on characters or attitudes in his narrative. Narrative is the easiest area in which to talk about contin-

uity; it is more difficult to speak of the continuity of a lyric or a drama. What follow in this chapter are some preliminary remarks on both lyric and dramatic modes, and a few supplementary reflections on the critical approach I have outlined here.

In lyric poetry, where continuity of attitude (however complex the attitude may be) is more obviously a necessity than where narrative interest may obscure the necessity for a while, we will find less violent breaks in tone than in narrative.[4] But breaks there will certainly be.

Spenser is a poet prone to lapses of various kinds that often do serious damage to the tone of poems of great brilliance. For instance, in praising his bride in *Epithalamion,* Spenser compares the amazement one would feel in beholding her beauty to the effect of viewing "Medusae's mazeful hed." The effect may be the same, but beauty is the cause in one instance, hideousness in the other. We cannot help linking unconsciously the bride and Medusa. Similarly, the "whiteness" (spotless innocence) of two young ladies about to be married in *Prothalamion* is compared to the whiteness of Jove as he came as a swan to Leda. Comparisons of whiteness can be effective, but again, we cannot help comparing also (with ludicrous effect) Jove's motives and the girls'. If either of the poems were consistently "witty" in tone or attitude either comparison would add, but they detract in the context in which they lie.[5] I attempt in chapter four to make a similar case for discontinuity in Keats' *Hyperion* where I find the dominant attitude or impulse in the author is towards epic sublimity but the language ever tends towards burlesque and mock epic.

Instability of authorial posture or attitude can of course have many causes, and certainly a variety of results (different sorts of discontinuities). It is also obvious that an author can have a perfectly stable posture and write a bad, continuous book. No approach to criticism can supply a touchstone for the absolute value of a literary work. The aim toward precision in articulating the

objectively-existing body of attitudes in a given work and the continuity of those attitudes is the critical impulse; it evaluates while it does not pass judgment (that is the prerogative of one's metacriticism). The business of criticism is gone about rightly when one gives his deepest attention to the unique tone of a literary work and its continuity. I think that if such attention is seen as the central job of criticism (and it is the burden of the essays following to persuade the reader to this view), then "better" criticism, that is, more real criticism, will result. We will find often no rape where rape has been charged, and, more importantly, be able to defend a work on better grounds, with more precision, than it has been defended. And one will very often find ultimately that what is called criticism is but good or bad scholarship or metacriticism using an assumed name.

*Lycidas* is a case in point. Samuel Johnson made what is ostensibly a criticism of the tone of *Lycidas,* and critics since Johnson, while denying his criticisms, have not yet, to my mind, defined the central attitudes of the poem or very satisfactorily argued its continuity.

Johnson saw that the poem was not about what it, in places, purported to be—it was hardly a pure tribute to a dead friend—and he felt rightly that impurity of motive (the same charge T. S. Eliot has brought against Donne) could indeed ruin a poem. Elaborate imagery and various evocations of literary traditions of the past, he felt, were extraneous to a poem whose purpose was to praise a particular person. The answer to Johnson, I suppose, is that Milton's purposes are not those of, say, his own fine tribute to Dr. Levett.

However, I do not think we are much enlightened as to the purposes of the poem by criticism that sees it as a logically progressing argument concerning man's mortality, using traditional models of pastoral elegy for its structure and substance. Once one has read all the pastoral elegies that were available to Milton one has yet only the skeleton or the bare frame of postures,

images, and themes from which Milton worked. All that is necessary to make a poem out of an exercise yet remains for the poet to do. If certain effects and attitudes in a poem can be justified only by traditional usage, the effect is a priori illegitimate. Knowledge of the tradition is a necessary tool of a critic, but *is* scholarship. The critic's job begins, does not end, after his tools are set in order.[6]

The poem, more precisely, it seems to me, is a conscious pastiche of attitudes towards death, differing attitudes taken up one after the other, the flow psychological, not at all dialectical, with patterns, sentiments, and imagery from past elegists used not as models but simply as material to point an attitude (which may be ironic towards the material). The tone of the poem *is* continuous: the artist, with his "negative capability" turns in his mind the various attitudes an artist might adopt towards death. The poem's "resolution" at the end does *not* spring from any dialectic process in the poem, but this is not a fault because the poem was not moving forward in that direction. Milton himself best defined the tone of *Lycidas* in his concluding lines, "He touched the tender tops of various quills/with eager thought warbling his doric lay."

I attempt in the following chapter to articulate with some precision this continuous posture of Milton in *Lycidas*, and then to consider and compare the responses of other critics. The comparative method is loosely maintained throughout this book, if only in the footnotes. But overt or not, it is a dominant impulse of the book, and in the final essay, chapter Thirteen, in the Crane study, it surfaces as the important operation I consider it to be.

With dramatic literature the difficulty in arriving at the true tonality of a work, the actual attitudes the work conveys to the observer, is for various reasons and in most cases greater than with narrative or lyric. Witness the various interpretations we have of Hamlet, or, even more pointed, Miss Helen Gardner's

sweet and noble Othello and that bestial Othello of F. R. Leavis. Or a different problem: we have no doubt, perhaps, that the minister in the film is a "raped" character, for whom we cannot hold Gide responsible when in fact the characterization is the work of film collaborators. So too might Christopher Marlowe have had collaborators in the drawing of all those discontinuous characters—Tamerlane of Part Two, Faustus of the middle sections, and Barabas of the last three acts. There will in fact be a large percentage of dramatic works performed where the scrupulous critic will find breaks in continuity of attitude because of the various hands at the helm of the work.

Just a word on the performing of a dramatic work. Without elaborate stage directions (and even then) there is the terrible problem of a middleman (director, actor, silent collaborator, for instance) muddling the tone of a piece. It is frightening (to some exhilarating), the infinite number of ways a dramatic piece can be altered in tone by interpreters. And with a piece of some age, the dramatic company, without even intending to, can declaim, gesticulate, and interact in the unconscious social styles of the day or place, and so completely alter effects desired by the playwright who wrote in terms of the declamations, gesticulations, and manners of the social styles of his own day (strategies, conventions we cannot know about in any adequate fullness).

In chapter Nine below, I try to deal with these critical limitations with respect to the drama of Shakespeare, to articulate the sense of consistency or continuity of attitude in Shakespeare toward his audience, which underlies the difficult (for us) conventions of the theater of his time.

For all the difficulty in the attempt to establish the tonality of a dramatic piece, it is imperative that we make the attempt if a performance is to have any point other than as an exhibition of what a contemporary artist can do using material from some other artist. Ideally, of course, if we are interested in a "pure" performance (impossible in actuality) of a play we consider

profound, subtle, and complex in tone, we need a selfless director of infinite critical capacity, and a body of especially sensitive critics to assist our ideal director in probing for that tonality.

Sensitivity to the true tone and continuity of tone of a piece, and the ability to articulate with accuracy and precision his sensitivity—this is the first and most important job of a critic. When he succeeds in his articulation he gives the world what can be properly called an insight, and there is a relative scarcity of these in any age. These insights are permanent parts of the culture from which they spring. The despair some have over the "relativity" of critical judgments is really due to a misuse of the words "criticism" and "evaluation." Evaluation of the continuity of an author's work on its own terms is the true starting point of criticism, and the fact that most critics react sloppily most of the time, all critics some of the time, does not make this sort of articulation less the hub of the process. Evaluation of the absolute value of the attitudes or "vision" of a work is metacriticism, not criticism, and is the sort of "critical" evaluation Northrop Frye is rightly against.

I would be perfectly clear this early in these essays about my claims for them. By critical approach, I mean approach literally as a road only which is going in the right direction. An approach does not guarantee good criticism; it can help avoid poor criticism. The words I have chosen to use throughout the book—tone, by which I mean simply the complex and unique set of attitudes present in a work of art, and continuity, by which I mean the fidelity to those attitudes (which, after all, the artist himself has created)—these words, like all abstract, generalizing words are but crude guideposts, only better road signs than some others to keep one in the "domain of criticism." And as there are an infinite number of subtly different attitudes in man and his art, so each discussion of the "continuity," or lack of it, in a work may bear little resemblance to the next. The "approach" is thus

rather atomistic and anti-categorizing. It is also not at all new, but I think it is a workable reformulation of the postulates with which analytical criticism has always worked. One might prefer the words "unity" or "coherence" or "consistency," but perhaps fresher words are needed to reestablish those postulates (a process always happening; I plead the same rationale for using words like "articulation" and "posture" in this book). I refer the reader to chapter Ten, "The Critical Act," for more detailed discussion of the approach.

But more importantly, I refer the reader now to the critical essays which follow. Each essay of Part One seeks to investigate the central impulses and attitudes of a work or body of work in the lyric, narrative, or dramatic mode—no attempt is made at complete critical adequacy. An essay like the one on Hopkins runs rather quickly through the whole body of his lyrics, attempting to demonstrate the shifting attitudes of Hopkins toward the central problem which dominated his poems. The Stevens essay tries to isolate a flirtation with a philosophic position in *Sunday Morning* which runs counter to the continuous body of attitudes towards reality and the imagination in Stevens' other lyrics. The *Ulysses* and the *Tristram Shandy* essays state what should be obvious, but never seems to get said: that the primary impulses in the books are involved with the joy-in-making, not with any philosophical or structural principles. The essays, then, have unity only in the common approach, the seeking and articulating of the center of a work and its continuity or lack of it by whatever method seems needed for each attempt.

Northrop Frye remarks in the introduction to *The Anatomy of Criticism*, that "the presence of incommunicable experience in the center of criticism will always keep criticism an art, as long as the critic recognizes that criticism comes out of it but cannot be built on it." I would comment first that the experience one gets from a work is communicable as a limit, that one critic can be much nearer to defining the tone of a work than another

critic, and that this is important. Second, a critical approach can be oriented toward the concept of continuity—this concept constituting a principle intrinsic to the work of art. The work may, perhaps, not embody the author's intentions, but it does have a tone, an impelling "vision" of its own, and this is what we grope for. Close readers of different times and places probably do not have a common psychological set, but with effort all readers of *Cinderella*, or what you will, can, in all important respects, attain through the author's creation of his illusion, his "tone," a common psychological state for the duration of the work.

It is the underlying purpose of Frye's great book to classify with precision. It is the point of this essay that even more important than classifying is the attempt to specify: that is, to articulate the unique tone of a unique work and to consider the continuity of that tone. In the process of doing this, I would assert, the critic will stand a better chance of experiencing an art work's unique illusion and of reacting acutely when and if the artist, or as more often happens, the critic, violates for whatever reason the integrity of the illusion.

# 2

# Lycidas *as Pastiche*

I WAS RATHER CAVALIER in my remarks on *Lycidas* and other works in the last chapter. I want now in this chapter and in those which follow to try to buttress those remarks. It is the premise of these essays that the literary work of art creates as one reads a psychological state (a complex of attitudes, the book's "tone") which can be articulated in precise and sensitive criticism.[1] This articulation is the primary aim of the critic. I have not found despite the voluminous bibliography what I feel is the unique tone, the complex of attitudes of *Lycidas*, convincingly articulated, though I do feel that that tone communicates itself to readers.*

* See *Milton's Lycidas: The Tradition and the Poem* (1961); excellently edited by C. A. Patrides, a collection of the best *Lycidas* essays, with a fine annotated bibliography. Scott Elledge's *Milton's Lycidas* (1966), contains substantial scholarly apparatus: poems in the pastoral tradition, contemporary remarks on elegy, biographical and historical material, and selections from commentary on the poem.

To call *Lycidas* a pastiche may seem needlessly extreme, but the word serves in two ways: 1) I feel it comes closer than others to describing the structural principles in the poem, and 2) I hope it dislodges a bit some fixed ideas about the poem, such as those which focus it as conventional or archetypal in its pattern and those which see a sort of rigid logic or rigorous dialectic progressing through it.[2]

The poem, it seems to me, has no direction (nor does it need any) save that of the forward and backward movement of the mind of the Christian poet as it flops and jumps and starts, engaged in a meditation upon last things and using conventional pastorale machinery for that meditation. That machinery has some traditional sequences just as Christian apologetics has some traditional answers to conventional eschatological problems, but we have in *Lycidas* a very bold mind breaking patterns and returning to them at will, and finally eschewing any pattern save the fidelity to the emotional fluctuations of its own brooding.[3] The drama of this mind in action is intensely moving; its twists and turns, its a-logical transitions demonstrate a flow more psychological than conventional. The poem is quite personal and unique in its handling of conventional materials, and yet its psychological fluctuations are typical of all men's broodings. The poem is magnificent and continuous, but not because of the traditional recipes or apologetics contained in it.

To be more specific, one is not reading the poem at all, as far as I am concerned, unless one finds maddening and fascinating (not conventional) the reason the poet's mind moves, say, from the two-handed engine which kills the wicked wolf, to the flower passage, then from the flowers to the vision of the floating corpse, and then most importantly from the corpse to the exulting "weep no more, woeful shepherds." Each movement is part of a drama of the mind and it is Milton's drama, not a conventional pastoral or mythic or dialectic flow (though within each of the mind's

movements are used conventional figurations to pose an attitude).

With immense impetuosity, Milton rushes in the first eighty-four lines through various responses towards death and the artistic task before him and ends with a resolution (Pheobus's) which is patently a Christian sort of answer. One feels that Milton has that answer all through the poem, Saint Peter's and the swain's being variations of it. There is little dialectic progress in the poem and no dialectic interest generated. What is interesting, what we want to know, is why Pheobus breaks in at half-line in line 76, or why Milton twice in the poem brings in his answers or resolutions only to apologize, both in line 87 ("That strain I heard was of a higher mood/But now my Oat proceeds") and in line 132 ("Return *Alpheus*, the dread voice is past,/That shrunk thy streams"), for thus breaking convention and logic. Further, why does Camus come as the third of four visitors—what is the logic of his appearing then rather than earlier? Or, why does Milton break impulsively in, at lines 100-2, on Hippotade's disclaimer of blame with his own (ambiguous) answer as to where the blame lies? And then why Camus after the interruption? The abrupt transitions from image to image all through this poem seem really to come out of the logic of the emotional, not the rational life, or literary reflex.

The answers I have to offer to the questions I have posed about the poem (and so many more could be asked) are perhaps no more important than the fact that with this poem (as with so many major poems) "criticism" has not handled very often or very well the obvious large internal questions. We do no good for the young man in love with Literature by the passing off of good scholarship as good criticism.

Is not the triple assertion of the Christian answer which separate passages of lyric sadness and tragic vision expressive dramatically of a mind struggling not to doubt (rather than of various three-part patterns given us, whether Hegelian, vegetal, or rhetori-

cal)? Are not the quick shifts in voice, imagery, and point of view expressive dramatically of a mind that will not rest in doubt (rather than of Milton's desire, as some scholars would lead one to think, to weight the poem with allusions from his reading and patterns from his models)? The poem bristles with such questions:

> Alas! What boots it with incessant care
> To tend the homely slighted Shepherds trade,
> And strictly meditate the thankles Muse,
> Were it not better don as others use,
> To sport with *Amaryllis* in the shade,
> Or with the tangles of Naera's hair?
> *Fame* is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
> (That last infirmity of Noble mind)
> To scorn delights, and live laborious dayes;
> But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find,
> And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
> Comes the blind *Fury* with th' abhorred shears,
> And slits the thin spun life. But not the praise,
> *Phoebus* repli'ed, and touch'd my trembling ears;
> *Fame* is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
> Nor in the glistering foil
> Set off to th' world, nor in broad rumour lies,
> But lives and spreds aloft by those pure eyes,
> And perfet witnes of all-judging *Jove;*
> As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
> Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed.

Who is it that answers the question ending in line 69? Is not the line expressive of the mind of the poet turning back swiftly on itself? Line 71 twists in a different direction; the mind turns again in this rapid sequence in line 73. The "But" of line 76 represents another turn, this time towards a calming resolution of the whole sequence. The resolution is accompanied (or

accomplished) by a switch of voice (poet to Pheobus) and tense (present to past), by theological violence (Jove all-judging, and in Heaven) and by apparent structural illogic (a resolution of sorts come too early). What is truly astounding in this short passage from a short poem is its audacity, its tone of independence from traditional controls and the vivid impression it gives of a mind in action, of a dynamic, swift, rather undirected movement, of a flow with the impelling forces more emotional than rational.

Let us examine further the mind-flow of the poet. Neptune asks the question of lines 91-2, and Hippotades brings the answer that the natural elements had nothing to do with the young man's death. The poet breaks in then with an air of impatience and anger; the style changes from reportorial to editorial, and the meaning of the answer is hard to fathom:

It was that fatall and perfidious Bark 100
Built in th' eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine. 102

The suggestions are of an evil Nemesis (more like Satan than Atropos). There is in the lines anguish that the sacred could fall thus to the power of evil.[4] The same ubiquity in divine justice is the first subject for the apparently helpless Saint Peter ("How well could I have spared for thee, young swain/Anow of such as for their bellies sake. . . ."). Why then separate passages developing a major attitude of the poem with the Camus lines?

Next *Camus*, reverend Sire, went footing slow, 103
His Mantle hairy, and his Bonnet sedge,
Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge
Like to that sanguine flower inscrib'd with woe.
Ah! Who hath reft (quoth he) my dearest pledge? 107

Milton in the face of Nemesis and death apparently felt more poignantly the loss of life, as figured in Cambridge and camaraderie, than he felt the necessity to enter immediately into Christian apologetics concerning cosmic justice. Saint Peter's

mind, like Milton's, is more on earth than on heaven, and full of pity and indignation. In his concluding lines we have another drama of a mind jumping rapidly from pity to anger to resolution:

> The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed,
> But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
> Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread:
> Besides what the grim Woolf with privy paw
> Daily devours apace, and nothing sed,
> But that two-handed engine at the door,
> Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.

The last two lines (whatever the "two-handed engine" refers to) are a resolution of the same sort as those of the Phoebus and the "Weep no more" passages: that is, all else does not logically lead up to them. They are not more important than other lines of other passages; they are *part*, the consoling part, of the whole complex of attitudes of the brooding mind of the poet. The impulse to make these assertions of transcendence the *raison d'etre* of the other attitudes in the poem is what lies behind many of the patterns that have been drawn for *Lycidas*. For however subtly done, many of the recent *Lycidas* essays tend to downgrade the attitudes in passages between Phoebus and Saint Peter, and between Saint Peter and the "Weep no more" (whereas older criticism often focused on the St. Peter passage as a "digression"). The flower passage, for instance, is called the "prologue" or beginning of a "third act" or "movement," or an interlude, a diversion, a stock item of pastoral elegy, or its own excuse—anything but a rendering of an attitude in the mind of the poet toward the problem of death of equal intensity to all the others. The theory has been that the passage must be "leading up" logically or rhetorically to something else to have real relevance. But if the whole is seen as a magnificent rendering of a mind in irresolution and conflict, then all this terribly misleading talk

of "resolution," with its implications of purposeful progress, comes to be off the mark. The flower passage seems simply and most movingly an attempt of the spirit to submerge its fears and terrors in the beauty of nature. That it is necessary after Saint Peter's speech signifies that the poet's spirit is not ready for consolation. That that spirit can slip so easily (in line 154) into the blackest vision of the whole poem, that of Lycidas sinking beneath the waves with the archangel helpless, is symptomatic of the brooding spirit's inability to be consoled by the world's frail beauty. The immediate leap then into apotheosis from the deepest and darkest spiritual state in the poem is the farthest thing from a resolution of all the atitudes of the poem; it is rather an obvious rejection of most of them.[5]

The leap has been dramatically prepared for. It is absolutely convincing that that mercurial "insubordinate" mind we have found everywhere in the poem would in the moment of deepest depression demand the highest exultation, that consolation would be acceptable only after the widest, deepest exploration of the alternative attitudes. What is unconvincing is the explaining away of the leap or any other effect in the poem by the laying on of pre-cut patterns, whether they be mythic patterns of death and rebirth or patterns out of literary tradition where, say, pastoral grief goes from bad to worse to better.[6] Richard P. Adams, in his "The Archetypal Pattern of Death and Rebirth in *Lycidas*" presents the archetypal pattern that often appears in pastoral elegy:

> The emotional pattern of the poem consists of a twofold movement. First it goes from the announcement of the friend's death downward through various expressions of sorrow to despair; then comfort is offered, and the sequence reverses itself until the conclusion is reached in heavenly joy. It is the conventional pattern of pastoral elegy, at least from the time of Virgil, and it is at the same time the pattern of Milton's feeling about death at the time he wrote *Lycidas*. (Patrides, p. 121-2)

This no more accounts for the unique drama and pattern of *Lycidas* than to say with Thomas Gradgrind that a horse is a "graminivorous quadruped." It is not that such patterns do not have some validity and interest, but that operating critically with them dulls the senses to the unique drama of the individual artist working out his expressive forms. Where else in mythic or pastoral patterns does the intensest moment of darkness provoke immediately the brightest moment of light? And if one finds a model, one can obviously never find the moment prepared for as it is in this unique context which dramatizes the tremulous psychology of the brooding poet. The unique context is the poem, its greatness is in the unique, continuous context, not in its somewhat sameness to other poems of the same genre.

The poet "touched the tender stops of various quills/with eager thought warbling his Doric lay." The "lay" expresses his "eager" ("impatient," "biting," "impetuous") thoughts, the various quills represent the various postures or attitudes his thoughts lead him to. The poem ends in diminuendo (186-93) because it is but a dramatization of a meditative mind, not a philosophic or any other sort of dialectic. He picked up one pipe, made music with it, put it down and played another. This is the quality of pastiche, though here of immensely significant pastiche. Milton has caught his own mind in action as it adopts various attitudes towards death. The continuity of the poem is in the completely convincing rendering of the dynamics, the shifting attitudes, of that mind. The switch in the last eight lines from first to third person is quite continuous with the tone of the whole poem as the poet here assumes an attitude of separation from the brooding self he must leave in order to go on living.

This is how I see the poem—patternless, save for the pattern of mind-flow of an immensely well-read and sensitive man who has felt the patterns in works of the artists and thinkers of the past and manipulates these patterns at will. This seems to me to

be a modest statement of the true formal dynamics of *Lycidas*. Most of the recent *Lycidas* essays insist on finding in the poem far more complex or rigid patterns, whether traditional, or mythic (unconsciously there), or dialectical. I would briefly note a few of these comments.

The following is from Arthur Barker on the "three movements" of *Lycidas*:

> The first movement laments Lycidas the poet-shepherd; its problem, the possible frustrations of disciplined poetic ambition by early death, is resolved by the assurance, "Of so much fame in heaven expect thy meed." The second laments Lycidas as priest-shepherd; its problem, the frustration of a sincere shepherd in a corrupt church, is resolved by Saint Peter's reference to the "two-handed engine" of divine retribution. The third concludes with the apotheosis, a convention introduced by Virgil in *Eclogue* V but significantly handled by Milton. He sees the poet-priest-shepherd worshipping the Lamb with those saints "in solemn troops" who sing the "unexpressive nuptial song" of the fourteenth chapter of Revelation. The apotheosis thus not only provides the final reassurance but unites the themes of the preceding movements in the ultimate reward of the true poet-priest. (Patrides, p. 126)

The analysis has the appearance of logical neatness, which hides the fact that it attributes in the poem no organic relation to the three movements save that poet and priest together get their eternal reward. By focusing on what is really mere description of the rhetorical figurations Milton uses, rather than the flow of emotions in the poet-shepherd which impel the figurations, Barker sacrifices our sense of the emotional continuity of the poem to satisfy our appetite for pat logical order.

The lust for rhetorical order and/or logical continuity is what is behind formulations such as this of Jon Lawrey:

We may however take an additional step toward reconciling the supposedly antagonistic modes of statement in *Lycidas* by considering the poem as in part a dialectical process, in the Hegelian sense: the initial dogmatic proposition (thesis) is opposed by a skeptical second (antithesis); from their encounter there arises a third statement, one of mystic certainty (synthesis). Within *Lycidas*, the major subject of this process is poetry itself. The timeless, serene, and objective attitudes of pastoral, impassioned only in formal artistic imitation of loss, are opposed by the skeptical affronts of death, temporal corruption, and several failures of consolation, all of which are impassioned in and through actual experience. However, each of these two modes of awareness or response is found to be incomplete in the course of the work and a consummate statement, greater than either but partaking of both, gradually evolves. (*PMLA* Vol. 77, p. 27)

Or this of Rosemond Tuve:

. . . not only is the poem a structure of cumulative, not contrasted, insights into the meaning of life and death, but also there is yet to come the vision of the nuptial union of the soul with the source of love, a third vision of judgement. Moreover, though it is notable that symbols are chosen at these three crucial points to convey great fundamental oppositions like growth and destruction, life and nothingness, union and sundering, fruition and annihilation, there is also the whole continuing web of the poem with its living and tender sense of imperishable sweetness in all moving and growing things. (Patrides, p. 172)

Or this of M. H. Abrams:

The movement of *Lycidas* . . . is patently from despair through a series of insights to triumphant joy. We can put it this way: read literally, the elegy proper opens with the statement "Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime"; it concludes with the flatly opposing statement "Lycidas your sorrow is *not* dead." Everything that intervenes has been planned to constitute a

> plausible sequence of thoughts and insights that will finally convert a logical contradiction into a lyric reversal by the anagnorisis, the discovery, that for a worthy Christian poet-priest a seeming defeat by death is actually an immortal triumph. (Patrides, p. 226)

What bothers me with these statements and others about *Lycidas* is the implication that all detail in the poem is constantly building or working toward resolution—the implications, that is, of "dialectic," or "cumulative," or "evolving"—statements which tend to falsify the integrity or quality of the doubt in the poem. The Christian Union of the dualism of life *is* the basis for Milton's *theology*, but what the *poem* renders is not the dialectic but a poet struggling in a very human way to maintain the dialectic. It is not (as the above statements imply) as if the poet-shepherd of the poem need pass through a process of discovery of the Christian answers; the "Weep no more" answer would be impossible in the poem if the poet were not a Christian long before the poem begins. The poet is not discovering Christianity, but attempting to keep his faith in it.

The feeling that one has read a poem when one has come to know the patterns of the genus to which it belongs, or the mythic pattern into which it falls, or the packaging of ideas it contains, or the sources or traditions or historical context for any or all of these is the scholar's false paradise. There is partial critical paralysis when the interested reader has not assimilated such information, but there is total critical paralysis when he rests with this information. The soul of a successful poem is in its uniqueness, its contextual pattern, its complex of attitudes which is like no other; and criticism's job, which begins where scholarship leaves off, is to react to and articulate this uniqueness. The sort of questions this essay asked about the uniqueness of *Lycidas* are not the sort to be answered by literary comparisons and analogies to other poets or poems or other disciplines. The body of attitudes

that impel *Lycidas* has an emotional continuity created by the dramatization of a mind not at ease, one which will impose no final formal ordering (hence "pastiche") on its intractable fluctuations. This articulation of response to the poem answers with more accuracy I feel, the critical questions I have posed, and accounts better for the reader's sense of the continuity in *Lycidas*, than the highly patterned paradigms that have been so often drawn in the literature on the poem.

# 3

# *Hopkins and* Figura

HOPKINS' POEMS have been with us for only about half a century, and so we still rush far too quickly to metacritical debate, as we do with Eliot, Yeats, Auden, and others, about how much a man's beliefs limit his poetry. In the individual poem and in the body of a man's poetry, it is the quality of the rendering—how successful he is in creating the world of a Catholic, a mystic, or materialist—that matters critically. As the Chinaman can live for a while in a Cinderella world, so can any reader—after some study in the scholarship and some critical probing—live in Hopkins' world. To be sure, the reader's metacritical sensibilities will sooner or later place the poems in a hierarchy of personal value. But what Hopkins' world is like at the center, the unique temper of the man's spirit, the obsessive concerns and conflicts, the postures, intellectual and emotional,

he adopts to wrestle with his conflicts, these are the *critical* questions about his poetry. It is simply to the purpose of speaking with some precision concerning attitudes and continuities of attitude on these questions in Hopkins' lyrics that this particular essay is offered. In the *Lycidas* essay the approach to the continuity of the poem was by way of asking critical questions concerning structural pattern. Here the approach to the continuity of each of Hopkins' lyrics and of the whole canon is by way of explication of substance, for this is the area where the questions, the confusions, and imprecision, lie:

> The basic questions about his greatness, direction, and even plain-sense are not yet answered. Almost every one of his poems has cruxes . . . that defeat exegetical activity. There is a strange absence, among so many books and articles, of any that can be called definitive—definitive on some aspects of interpretation.[1]

There is a question we can ask about Hopkins' poetry which I believe leads us quickly to the central attitudes and deepest conflicts in the poems, those conflicts which endure and make one continuous drama of his slender body of lyrics. We can state it thus cryptically: "Did Hopkins believe in a Figural universe?"

I have in mind Erich Auerbach's definition of *Figura* in his book *Mimesis*:

> In this conception, an occurrence on earth signifies not only itself but at the same time another, which it predicts or confirms, without prejudice to the power of its concrete reality here and now. The connection between occurrences is not regarded as primarily a chronological or causal development but as a oneness with the divine plan, of which all occurrences are parts and reflections. Their direct earthly connection is of secondary importance and often their interpretation can altogether dispense with any knowledge of it. (1953 edition, p. 555)

Now of course Hopkins never altogether dispensed with the intimate observation of concrete reality (the *haecceitas*), but I

think the poetry supports the contention that Hopkins changed in his attitude toward nature and hence toward the concept of *Figura*. He believed (perhaps better—hoped) for most of his life that concrete objects were structured by God to render forth information of God's will and purpose. But later he came to deny (not without terrible tension) the primary importance of the concrete object, and, apparently, to discard a figural conception of things.[2]

Let me frame the question we are to ask less abstractly by using a text from the poems. What is suggested, say, by the ember in Hopkins' "Windhover"?

> blue-black embers . . .
> Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

The fall of the embers reveals the red core to our sight and reminds us of the crucifixion and Christ's blood. Or perhaps we are reminded of Man's original fall and of our immortal soul aflame in the mortal body. Any reader can accept these as metaphor. The question is whether God is purposely and constantly revealing himself and his will over and over again through such as the falling ember, or whether the ember is a mere emblem with which the poet embellishes a truth of revelation revealed but once? Do "especial" things tell only of their own specific nature, or do they give, in addition, analogous spiritual information? The poem, I would assert, is not intended to give a specific answer. But a central passage from Hopkins' *Wreck of the Deutschland* is somewhat more explicit:

> I kiss my hand
> To the stars, lovely-asunder
> Starlight, wafting him out of it; and
> Glow, glory in thunder;
> Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-damson west:
> Since, tho' he is under the world's splendour and wonder,

His mystery must be instressed, stressed;
For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand.

Not out of his bliss
Springs the stress felt
Nor first from heaven (and few know this)
Swings the stroke dealt—
Stroke and stress that stars and storms deliver,
That guilt is hushed by, hearts are flushed by and melt—
But it rides time like riding a river
(And here the faithful waver, the faithless fable and miss).

It dates from day
Of his going in Galilee;
Warm-laid grave of a womb-life grey;
Manger, maiden's knee;
The dense and the driven Passion, and frightful sweat;
Thence the discharge of it, there its swelling to be,
Though felt before, though in high flood yet—
What none would have known of it, only the heart,
being hard at bay,
Is out with it!

How does the starlight waft Him out of it, or how is His glory *in* the thunder? Hopkins says that God is not immanent in nature, He is *under* the world's splendor and wonder. What does "under" mean in this context? It can mean simply "beyond" or "out of" or it could mean in addition "responsible for," "creator of." I would paraphrase the seventh line of the stanza in this way: "I kiss my hand to the stars since His mystery *must* be figured in them." The "must" is a statement of faith, but not of an arrogant faith. Hopkins on some days can read what is figured in the stars; on other days he cannot find God in the lovely stars. This is the tension of the early poems, the doubt which will separate spirit from the stars in the later poems.

It is the Grace of God (the felt "stroke" or "stress") which was first revealed to all of us at a moment in time at Galilee that enables us, in our "days" or moments, to understand God through the stars, the storm, or the dappled West. God (or His "bliss") is not immanent in objects, or phenomena, nor was his nature recognized in the creation from its first day. The universe was figured on the first day, but none would have known of it without the revelations of Christ (although the prophets had and the "heart being hard at bay" has intimations of something of the truth of God). God's Grace has been always with us (the river), but the understanding, the knowledge of Grace (riding the river) has been possible only since the Atonement. Thus revelation tells us what concrete objects cannot, though once told we can see the message there implicit (figured) in nature. It is not hard to find passages in Hopkins that similarly imply that he saw (or wished to see) the world as *Figura* often and for much of his life.[3] It is to the change in attitude in later poems that I wish to turn.

In the poems of the Dublin period the beauty of the particulate in the world, the piedness of nature, no longer appears to serve as any sustenance for the spirit wrestling with eschatological problems. In the poem "To What Serves Mortal Beauty," he asks

> What do then? how meet beauty? Merely meet it; own,
> Home at heart, heaven's sweet gift; then leave,
> let that alone.
> Yea, wish that though, wish all, God's better
> beauty, grace.

Grace is *all* now. Were nature still figural for Hopkins, we would expect "mortal beauty" to console as revelation consoles.

In that magnificent poem "Spelt from Sybil's Leaves," Hopkins, dwelling on death and judgment, sees the entire concern

with the "skeined" variety in life wholly irrelevant to salvation. The approaching evening envelops in greyness all but the black dragonish boughs (his presumptuous thoughts and deeds?):

> Our evening is over us; our night whelms, whelms
> and will end us.
> Only the beak-leaved boughs dragonish damask the
> tool-smooth bleak light; black,
> Ever so black on it. Our tale, O our oracle! Let
> life, waned, ah let life wind
> Off her once skeined stained veined variety upon,
> all on two spools; part, pen, pack
> Now her all in two flocks, two folds—black, white;
> right, wrong; reckon but, reck but, mind
> But these two; ware of a world where but these two
> tell, each off the other; of a rack
> Where selfwrung, selfstrung, sheathe-and-shelter-
> less, thoughts against thoughts in groans grind.

The varied colors of our mortal world are now, it seems, deceiving. There is a world where reckoning is made in blacks and whites only, two "spools," two "flocks," right and wrong. Hopkins cautions his soul to be aware of that other, final, moral world that this world seems to deny:

> I cast for comfort I can no more get
> . . . . [Than] . . . . Thirst can find
> Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet.

The wet (vital and various) world cannot serve Hopkins' thirst for salvation. The natural world does not seem any more to be structured by God as a great analogue to the spiritual world. For nature is a Heraclitean Fire and teaches nothing but thoughts of personal annihilation:

> Million-fueled, nature's bonfire burns on.
> But quench her bonniest, dearest to her, her
> clearest-selved spark

Man, how fast his firedint, his mark on mind, is
gone!
Both are gone in an unfathomable, all is in an
enormous dark
Drowned. O pity and indignation! Manshape,
that shone
Sheer off, disseveral, a star, death blots black
out; nor mark
Is any of him at all so stark
But vastness blurs and time beats level. Enough!
the Resurrection,
A heart's-clarion! Away grief's gasping.

The dejection through the observation of nature, the exultation from the contemplation of the Resurrection's promise occur in the same line; the "enough" dismisses the natural world with a gesture of absolute separation. Beauty, nature, natural theology, all these are distinct from revelation and the spiritual reality.

Hopkins, it seems, divorced himself from the idea of *Figura*, but the thirst for beauty as palliative is nowhere more evident than in "Heraclitean Fire," where the description of "veined" nature is spectacularly precise and original. An exquisite tension obtains in much of Hopkins' poetry between a masterful craft and the poet's ultimate renunciation of any art save that of living in Grace. The earnestness of Hopkins' concern for Grace coupled with his immense attachment to the natural world are the continuous elements in his poetry; their late uncoupling is the last sequence of a continual meditation.

# 4

# *Keats: Bathos in* Hyperion

Many there are that can fall, but few can arrive at the felicity of falling gracefully.

Alexander Pope, *Peri Bathous: Or, of the Art of Sinking in Poetry.*

He spake, and ceas'd, the while a heavier threat
Held struggle with his throat but came not forth
For as in theatres of crowded men
Hubbub increases more they call out "Hush!"

*Hyperion,* Book I

Over and over again in *Hyperion,* especially in the first book, Keats—one of our wisest and subtlest poets—falls, not gracefully, into bathos. It is a fall of genius which cannot move about in the style or the situation it has imposed upon it-

self. There is genius in the poem; passages of great beauty and an intriguing pattern of symbols move toward statements of depth and value. But there is fundamental discontinuity in *Hyperion* between serious epic desires and bathos of execution, a discontinuity that implies irresolution in the poet.

In previous chapters here I have tried to demonstrate that irresolution concerning life and death is the theme of Milton's *Lycidas*, a change in world-vision the large movement in Hopkins' poetry, but that these philosophic instabilities create no shock of discontinuity in the reader, for he is constantly made aware that the problem of stability of posture is what the poems are about. With *Hyperion*, however, the reader finds the touch of comic opera constantly working against the dignity of world-view the poem wants to express. There have been many essays on Keats's intent, but I find the literature on the poem rather unresponsive to the fact that (as he himself intimated) Miltonizing was something of a disaster for Keats.[1] I will not then in this particular essay probe for world-vision, philosophic attitudes, as I have done in the previous essay.

The problems of the poem are of the surface. Here, as with the Spenser passages cited in chapter One, the reader cannot help doubting the continuity or integrity of attitudes when they are so often delivered in a style and diction incongruous with attitudes of much seriousness.

Pope's essay, quoted from in an epigraph to this chapter, is a spoof of the bathetic results almost inevitable in imitations of the Miltonic style. The essay applies a rather strict rationalistic ideal in the analysis of poetic metaphor. The method is simplistic as a whole, but it can illuminate through satire what is wrong with *Hyperion:* the bathos of the surface is too pervasive to overcome. *Hyperion* is consistently bathetic in that its diction, metaphor, and gesture are now too low, now too inflated for the situations of the epic. It is as Pope counseled the novice who wished to excel in the bathetic:

> The first rule is to draw [metaphor] from the *lowest things*, which is a certain way to sink the highest; as when you speak of the Thunder of Heaven, say
>
> The *Lords above* are *angry* and *talk big*.

Pope further advises the aspiring artist-in-sinking to inflate simple questions like "Who knocks at the door" to "For whom thus rudely pleads my loud-tongued gate / That he may enter?" Much of *Hyperion* is as though made by such recipes.

Milton's landscapes, his characterizations, and his diction are, except for a few lapses, consistently "sublime"—large, expansive, and noble. It is otherwise with *Hyperion*. Keats's deities often appear as gigantic freaks in a normal-sized bower, at various times stupid, sad, low, or petulant, while the diction runs the gamut from the heroic to the vulgar. Here is Hyperion entering his palace:

> He entered, but he entered full of wrath;
> His flaming robes streamed out beyond his heels,
> And gave a roar, as if of earthly fire,
> That scared away the meek ethereal Hours
> And made their dove-wings tremble. On he flared,
> From stately nave to nave, from vault to vault,
> Through bowers of fragrant and enwreathed light,
> And diamond-paved lustrous long arcades,
> Until he reached the great main cupola;
> There standing fierce beneath, he stamped his foot,
> And from the basements deep to the high towers
> Jarred his own golden region; and before
> The quavering thunder thereupon had ceased,
> His voice leapt out, despite of godlike curb,
> To this result: "O dreams of day and night!
> O monstrous forms! O effigies of pain!
> O specters busy in a cold, cold gloom!
> O lank-eared Phantoms of black-weeded pools!
> Why do I know ye? Why have I seen ye? Why
> Is my eternal essence thus distraught?

The passage is full of absurdities. Is it not awkward to have "flaming" robes "stream"? for Hyperion to "roar" like a beast (unless it is the robes which roar)? And the syntax would have "earthly fire" roaring too. Is not "scared away" a vulgar descent in diction? And does not the image of the meek girls fluttering away conjure up a "Victorian" household and make Hyperion appear a tyrannical ass? And if not in those lines, then certainly in the line where the most noble gesture of rage Keats can summon is to have Hyperion stamp his foot. One wonders further how a "godlike curb" is any different from any other kind of curb. Why is "leapt out," with its suggestion of the aggressive beast in its lair, at all appropriate to Hyperion's situation? And the lame result of the leap is to apostrophize those comic "lank-eared phantoms" and to ask the fatuous questions "Why do I know ye? Why have I seen ye? Why is my eternal essence thus distraught?"

The first book labors for effects of grandeur and for magnitude of argument, but uses to attain these effects incongruous or banal metaphor, comic gesture, empty rhetoric, bizarre jumps in levels of diction, and delineations of the gods as grotesque children, fools, and burlesques:

> he shouted,
> "Titans, behold your God!" at which some groaned;
> Some started on their feet; some also shouted;
> Some wept, some wailed. . . . (Bk. II 11. 109-112)

And no wonder, for these sleepy infant giants must listen to oratory like this:

> "Or shall we listen to the over-wise,
> Or to the over-foolish, Giant Gods?
> Not thunderbolt on thunderbolt, till all
> That rebel Jove's whole armoury were spent,
> Not world on world upon these shoulders piled,

> Could agonize me more than baby-words
> In midst of this dethronement horrible.
> Speak! roar! shout! yell! ye sleepy Titans all.

Enceladus, who voiced the "ponderous syllables" above, delivered the "booming" oration while "still upon his arm / He leaned; not rising from supreme contempt." We wonder if it is contempt or if he is not really just another sleepy Titan (especially when we recall the earlier comic description of him as "Upon his elbow raised, all prostrate else"). Saturn's oratory is no better:

> O Titans, shall I say, "Arise!"—Ye groan:
> Shall I say "Crouch!"—Ye groan. What can I then?

We are told everyone is angry, but everybody lounges around nonetheless. The scenes of *Hyperion* often read like a parody of the first two books of *Paradise Lost*, and the unfortunate question often occurs whether Keats had not tongue-in-cheek here and there, whether perhaps the pressure of his awareness of the pompousness and hollowness of his effects did not find temporary relief in *jeux d'esprit*. (Keats, it seems to me, *was* aware of the bathos in *Hyperion*. *The Fall of Hyperion* is to me a vastly superior poem, both in its allegory and in its technique. And in it much of the bathos with which this essay is concerned is absent.)

Hyperion, eighteenth-century-gentleman god, sniffing snuff and fearless of the howl of dogs, has in the following passage heartaches proportional to the thickness of his fibres (as he sits on fire):

> Blazing Hyperion on his orbed fire
> Still sat, still snuff'd the incense, teeming up
> From man to the sun's God; yet unsecure:
> For as among us mortals omens drear
> Fright and perplex, so also shuddered he—

Not at dog's howl, or gloom-bird's hated screech,
Or the familiar visiting of one
Upon the first toll of his passing-bell,
Or prophesyings of the midnight lamp;
But horrors, portion'd to a giant nerve,
Oft made Hyperion ache.

Milton renders his large effects, but in *Hyperion* we are asked to accept all things as inexpressible, greater and more wonderful than we can know through simple assertion of the fact:

Meanwhile in other realms big tears were shed
More sorrow like to this, and such like woe,
Too huge for mortal tongue or pen of scribe.

Some words she spake . . .
Some mourning words, which in our feeble tongue
Would come in these like accents; O how frail
To that large utterance of the early Gods!

Keats' efforts in epic circumlocutions for "he said" and "she said" are consistently comic:

[Apollo] Thus answered, while his white melodious throat
Throbbed with the syllables . . .
[Clymene] Wording timidly among the fierce. . . .

[Saturn] snatched utterance thus. . . .

[Thea] quick-voiced spake. . . .

[Hyperion] spake and ceased, the while a heavier threat
Held struggle with his throat but came not forth. . . .

When Saturn finally snatches utterance—lo! what nonsense comes from the mouth of him who had created a universe once:

> "But cannot I create?
> Cannot I form? Cannot I fashion forth
> Another world, another universe,
> To overbear and crumble this to naught?
> Where is another chaos? Where?"

Though the passage may be allowed to have allegorical intent, it must be admitted that Saturn asking directions to another chaos is high theological comedy.

Such fatuous words of Saturn somehow reach the young revolutionaries on Olympus (probably through the godlike loudness of his voice):

> That word
> Found way unto Olympus, and made quake
> The rebel three.

Saturn in his "word" is inclined to repetitive and empty rhetorical questions:

> "O tender spouse of bold Hyperion,
> Thea, I feel thee ere I see thy face;
> *Look up,* and let me see our doom in it;
> *Look up, and tell me* if this feeble shape
> Is Saturn's; *tell me,* if thou hear'st the voice
> Of Saturn; *tell me,* if this wrinkling brow,
> Naked and bare of its great diadem,
> Peers like the front of Saturn. . . .
>
> . . . I am gone
> Away from my own bosom: I have left
> My strong identity, my real self,
> Somewhere between the throne, and where I sit
> Here on this spot of earth. *Search, Thea, search!*
> *Search, Thea, search! and tell me,* if thou seest
> A certain shape or shadow, making way
> With wings or chariot fierce to repossess

A heaven he lost erewhile: it must—it must
Be of ripe progress—Saturn must be King . . .

Thea! Thea! Thea! *where is Saturn?*"
(italics mine here and below)

Thea is not treated much better by Keats: by inevitable transference of metaphor in the following passage, she appears to be Amazon, Virago, and indifferent torturer of man.

By her in stature the tall Amazon
Had stood a pigmy's height, she would have ta'en
Achilles by the hair and bent his neck;
Or with a finger stay'd Ixion's wheel.

A bit later Keats's qualifiers imply that Thea has no heart, feels no pain:

One hand she press'd upon that aching spot
Where beats the human heart, as if just there
Though an immortal, she felt cruel pain.

But such a slur is compensated for later when the Gods, like us, are unable to control love-sickness and so perform

All those acts which Deity supreme
Doth ease its heart of love in.

Be that as it may, we cannot be overly taken with Saturn when we are told that his locks "ooze with sweat." We wonder that Keats is capable of indecorous diction, but such lapses, and other lapses in logic and metaphor happen so often in *Hyperion* as to destroy all illusion of epic breadth and grandeur.

O *aching* time! O moments *big* as years!
All as ye pass *swell out* the *monstrous* truth,
And *press it so* upon our weary griefs
That *unbelief has not a space to breathe.*
Saturn, sleep on . . .

[truth compared to a pregnancy? Unbelief
as a dead child? And in the "womb" of Saturn?]

Stars pant:

Point me out the way
To any one particular beauteous star,
And I will flit into it with my lyre,
And make its silvery splendour pant with bliss.

Gigantic Titans mourn in a "*nest,*" surrounded by boulders which

Forehead to forehead held their monstrous horns
And thus in a thousand hugest phantasies
Made a fit roofing to this nest of woe.

There is no Milton or Dante in the vulgar gothic of Keats's suffering gods:

Their *clenched teeth still clench'd,* and all their
limbs
Lock'd up like veins of metal, *crampt and screw'd*
Without a motion, save of *their big hearts*
Heaving in pain, and horribly convuls'd
With *sanguine feverous boiling gurge of pulse.* . . .

Next Cottus: prone he lay, *chin uppermost,*
*As though in pain;* for still upon the flint
He *ground severe his skull,* with open mouth
And eyes at horrid working.

Nor much sublimity in the word "noise"

And ocean too; *with all its solemn noise* . . .

*There is a noise*
*Among immortals* when a God gives a sign,
*With hushing finger,* how he means to load
His tongue with the full weight of *utterless*
*thought.*

Or in the word "*poz'd*" ("Whether through poz'd conviction or disdain") and *scummy* ("A mist arose, as from a scummy marsh"). *Hyperion* is rich in demurrers like 1) "realmless eyes" 2) "locks not oozy," and 3) "Fate had poured a mortal oil upon his head / a disanointing poison." We might spend a long while attempting to unscramble the metaphors hidden in, and justify the language of, the following clogged lines:

> How to feed fierce the crooked stings of fire,
> And singe away the swollen clouds of Jove,
> Stifling that puny essence in its tent.

Or a longer while marveling at the incredible bathos in that most fatuous hero Hyperion wanting to bring dawn up in the middle of the night, just for a change:

> While still the dazzling globe maintain'd eclipse,
> Awaiting for Hyperion's command.
> Fain would he have commanded, fain took throne
> And bid the day begin, if but for change.
> He might not:—No, though a primeval God:
> The sacred seasons might not be disturb'd.
> Therefore the operations of the dawn
> Stayed in their birth, even as here 'tis told.

Most of the second and third books of *Hyperion* are free of bathos; some of the first book is. But the poem is paralyzed by the wealth of bathetic material in its beginnings. Saturn early dissipates whatever nobility some passages would give him; Hyperion, supposed hero of the book, never acquires any at all; the minor characters yell, groan, and sleep as in comic opera.[2] With this load of bathos, *Hyperion* often seems intended as burlesque, perhaps self-burlesque. It is as if the poet is forcing himself into areas of the imagination where he is not at home. Keats had a fine eye for irony, including self-irony, as well as a magnificent lyric gift and a keen and capacious mind. Here in *Hyperion* he struggles up Parnassus with Homeric hopes and a harlequin's

disposition. He has come prepared to juggle rather than declaim. *Hyperion* seems to be without continuity of attitude because the poet is unsure of what his attitudes are towards what he is doing. The poem has not the continuity of a poem about irresolution; it is a poem that cannot hide it.

# 5

# *Wallace Stevens'* Sunday Morning

*Sunday Morning*, although perhaps Stevens' most famous poem, does not always ring with the tone that Stevens so often achieves. That tone is one of putting forth doctrines of the imaginative life only half believed in, or believed in only in "golden moments," of honesty to the poverty of the human spirit which has lost belief, which in order to endure must whip up "blessed" illusions, a tone which is consistently self-ironic, self-mocking and anti-romantic.[1] Of course it would be no fault, but only surprising, that *Sunday Morning* should be uncharacteristic, if the poem exhibited a continuity of tone within itself. However, there are in fact parts of the poem which constitute rape upon the attitudes of other parts. The eight-stanza version as we have it in *Collected Poems* is blemished by passages which Stevens once omitted and which adopt attitudes toward the

imagination and the dualistic condition of man discontinuous (inconsistent) with the poem's posture elsewhere.

*Sunday Morning* was published as we now have it in Stevens' first volume *Harmonium* in 1923, but there appeared a five stanza version in *Poetry* magazine of November 1915. Only two lines read differently in the first version but the stanza arrangement is I, VIII, IV, V, and VII, which gives this version a quite different tone and attitude.[2] The rewriting, cutting and rearranging were all Stevens' work, with some prompting by Harriet Monroe. The *Poetry* version is much closer to the characteristic attitudes of Stevens and is to me a more continuous poem within itself. I propose first to try to articulate the attitudes of the five stanza version of *Sunday Morning* and then turn to the added stanzas (II, III, and VI, of the final version) which strike me as damaging to and discontinuous in the poem as it stands. It has been my experience over several years with Stevens readers and critics that the difficulties with the surface of Stevens' poems are the overriding ones—difficulties in grasping simple meaning, and logical transitions in argument. And so I have adopted in this essay a paraphrastic method of stanza-by-stanza explication. I do not consider the method vulgar, simply necessary, to bring discussion to where the critical difficulties exist.

In *précis* the logical and emotional flow of the *Poetry* version of the poem runs thus:

Stanza I is a rendering, not totally free from irony (the peignoir, the cockatoo), of the comforts of the imagination ("the pungent oranges and the bright green wings"), and also of the woman's fears of mortality and the desire for a less perishable bliss (the promise of Palestine). This is followed by VIII, an immediate statement denying Palestine's promise and defining reality: the world of chaos without permanence for the woman. The next stanza (IV in the final version) gives the imagination its due while denying the possibility of knowledge of unearthly

paradises. It is admitted that it is memory ("remembrance") and desire that make of the earth even a transitory paradise for the mortal observer. The following stanza (v in the final version) establishes the fragile beauty and transience of all human desire and human achievement. The last stanza (VII in the final version) deals with the maximum answer to desire in a world without informing spirit—that is, the accepting and chanting of reality. It is a reality of wind and air, of "choirs" that outlast poets, who perish like the dew.

There is then in this first version a "monster" in the poem. There always is in Stevens, but it is not so shadowy in the *Poetry* version of *Sunday Morning* as in the final version. The *Poetry* version (below) is not a panegyric on reality, as some have called it, but an attempt to reconcile oneself to it.

I

Complacencies of the peignor, and late
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
And the green freedom of a cockatoo
Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.
She dreams a little, and she feels the dark
Encroachment of that old catastrophe,
As a calm darkens among water-lights.
The pungent oranges and bright, green wings
Seem things in some procession of the dead,
Winding across wide water, without sound,
Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet
Over the seas, to silent Palestine,
Dominion of the blood and sepulchre.

II

She hears, upon that water without sound,
A voice that cries, "The tomb in Palestine
Is not the porch of spirits lingering.

It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay."
We live in an old chaos of the sun,
Or old dependency of day and night,
Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,
Of that wide water, inescapable.
Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail
Whistle about us their spontaneous cries;
Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;
And, in the isolation of the sky,
At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
Ambiguous undulations as they sink,
Downward to darkness, on extended wings.

The first stanza needs little commendation or explication. It renders perfectly, by means of the figure of the calm darkening among water lights, the deprivation of color in life that comes inevitably when the brooding mind closes off the senses. The preciosity of the imagery of the first five lines mocks the life of the senses somewhat. The second stanza is likewise beyond praise or blame. The "voice that cries" is presumably a voice within the woman herself (in Stevens' world there are no spirits outside ourselves). The lines following, the poet describing the truth of things to the woman, are so beautifully expressed that one must keep in mind that they are not cheering lines concerning the human condition. We are free, to be sure, from damnation, but death is inescapable and final. The quail's cry is spontaneous; it has, and the doves bring down, no message for us. Berries ripen where they do us no good. There is no friend in the sky. We are dependent (on Time) and are alone. The casual flocks of pigeons sink downwards and there is both beauty and terror in the sight—the beauty of the circling, the terror of the darkness. Our perception of these phenomena is thus an ambiguous experience. It does not satisfy desire, though it makes the isolation of the sky more bearable. In the final version of

*Sunday Morning* with this stanza as the final one in the poem, one is left with the impression that this vision of reality is enough for Stevens and should be enough for us. In the pattern of the *Poetry* version, stanza VIII is but the second with three to follow which concern the necessary chants that man makes in order to be able to live within this objective reality. The next stanza picks up the bird imagery:

III

She says, "I am content when wakened birds
Before they fly, test the reality
Of misty fields, by their sweet questionings;
But when the birds are gone, and their warm fields
Return no more, where, then, is paradise?"
There is not any haunt of prophecy,
Nor any old chimera of the grave,
Neither the golden underground, nor isle
Melodious, where spirits gat them home,
Nor visionary south, nor cloudy palm
Remote on heaven's hill, that has endured
As April's green endures; or will endure
Like her remembrance of awakened birds,
Or her desire for June and evening, tipped
By the consumation of the swallow's wings.

IV

She says, "But in contentment I still feel
The need of some imperishable bliss."
Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,
Alone, shall come fulfilment to our dreams
And our desires. Although she strews the leaves
Of sure obliteration on our paths,
The path sick sorrow took, the many paths
Where triumph rang its brassy phrase, or love
Whispered a little out of tenderness,
She makes the willow shiver in the sun
For maidens who were wont to sit and gaze

Upon the grass, relinquished to their feet.
She causes boys to bring sweet-smelling pears
And plums in ponderous piles. The maidens taste
And stray impassioned in the littering leaves.

These two stanzas of the first version (IV and V of the final version) both begin with expressions of discontent by the brooding woman whose desire is still for a paradise, for imperishable bliss. The "voice" counters each by saying that there is no answer that will satisfy that desire but, still, man must dream to endure though he has nothing permanent to build dreams upon. The woman first declares, carrying on the figuration of birds' flights of the preceding stanza, that the knowledge of one's environment within reality, the love of it, is a proper occupation for youth, but what of the mature fears of death and desire for permanence? The poet then, in contrasting heavenly "chimeras" and "April's green," does not pretend that April (or the oranges or the pigeons) will satisfy desire, but only that these endure beyond our mythologies. What also endures, Stevens says, is the human desire for paradises. And in the absence of belief one must satisfy the desire as best one can by fictions shaped out of memory and desire, emotional selections from reality, like the warm June nights, the swallow's wing, or the rug with the cockatoo.

But the woman (and there is such a woman in all of us) protests that this will not do. The poet answers, very well, it does not do, nothing can do. We are mortal and so our desires cannot be fulfilled. The leaves are strewn around (figuring obliteration); we see them as we walk on the path toward death in the inexorable process. The beauty of the walk can make us forget the end of it, or the end considered can make more moving the beauty. The figurations of the leaves and the path and Death our mother are subtly and beautifully inwoven in the last lines:

She causes boys to bring sweet-smelling pears
And plums in ponderous piles. The maidens taste
And stray impassioned in the littering leaves.

At the risk of murdering to dissect, we must be clear (if abstract) about these lines. Nature is there for our use as material for fictions, for the "plums and pears" of the "boys" (poets) who wish to please their "maidens" (human desire). The maiden within the self tastes and rises impassioned, walks down the path among the littering leaves to experience love intermittently and death finally.[3]

The last stanza in the poem in the *Poetry* version (stanza VII in the final version) has puzzled readers. There is a sadness beneath the boisterous surface:

V

Supple and turbulent, a ring of men
Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn
Their boisterous devotion to the sun,
Not as a god, but as a god might be,
Naked among them, like a savage source.
Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,
Out of their blood, returning to the sky;
And in their chant shall enter, voice by voice,
The windy lake wherein their lord delights,
The trees, like serafin, and echoing hills,
That choir among themselves long afterward.
They shall know well the heavenly fellowship
Of men that perish and of summer morn.
And whence they came and whither they shall go
The dew upon their feet shall manifest.

The same will, or "blood" for poetic illusion that causes the "maidens" to rise, and the "boys" to bear, despite the fact they go to death, impels these "men" to make fictions of (to "chant" of) perceived reality, of the "sun." This spontaneous impulse, which is inviolable to metaphysical gloom, is the poets' "lord." But the chanting to the sun is done by the "naked" primitive in us, what Stevens calls elsewhere our "nigger self," not by the whole man.[4] The sophisticated Stevens is exploiting the comedy

and incongruity in the reversion to savagery, orgy, and mindlessness as the answer for the brooding woman in the chair. Men that perish, men of dew, cannot feel for very long the orgiastic delight that Stevens imbues his worshippers with. They will sing only "on a summer's morn." The poignant irony of the last two lines is almost lost, so persuasive is the joy of the summer chant.[5] The first version of *Sunday Morning* ends then in the tone that had dominated the poem—one of irony and poignancy, and an acceptance of the tragic vision which underlies the dualisms Stevens has poised.

Despite the plodding analysis above, I have given only a sketch (though I think an accurate sketch) of the contexture and flow of attitudes in that five-stanza poem. This shorter version presents a consistent, complex, and coherent posture toward the relation of man—his desires and his powers—to the world he looks out upon. Further, it is my reaction that the three added stanzas and the rearrangement of stanzas in the final version violate this subtle consistency of attitudes. The three stanzas omitted and the remaining five stanzas were rearranged by Stevens himself (see note 2). I think that after having examined the five stanza version and the three excluded stanzas, it will not be difficult to see why at one time Stevens was willing to drop the latter stanzas: that he himself felt these three discontinuous with the "idea" or attitude about the world and the human situation that informs the five stanza version (and, to my mind, the body of his poetry).

> Why should she give her bounty to the dead?
> What is divinity if it can come
> Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
> Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,
> In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else
> In any balm or beauty of the earth,
> Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?

Divinity must live within herself:
Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
Elations when the forest blooms; gusty
Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;
All pleasures and all pains, remembering
The bough of summer and the winter branch.
These are the measures destined for her soul.

The stanza (II in the final version) has lovely sound, but it is weak as an answer to the woman's questions. The rhetorical questions asked are simply hedges, especially the third (ll. 1-7). The beauty of the imaginative apprehension of reality, the music made of the soul's emotions, can *not* be cherished as the thought of Heaven. Heaven promises "imperishable bliss" which satisfies the woman's hunger for permanence. Without a belief in Heaven there is, Stevens says, *no* fulfillment possible of our deepest dreams and desires for permanence:

She says, "But in contentment I still feel
The need of some imperishable bliss."
Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,
Alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams
And our desires.

The poignant irony of the poet's answer here to the woman's need is most characteristic of Stevens and makes clear the tension and ambiguity of the answer; this ambiguity is lacking in the haze of the answer in the added stanza. The posture (or pretense) of that stanza, and each of the three added stanzas, is of solving problems (such as the endless hunger for permanence) when one is only describing them.

The next lines (8-15) offer an evocation of the dualistic condition of life: passions, moods, grieving, elations, pleasures and pains, all are inevitable. This could be a coherent vision of necessity, but what is discontinuous with the attitude of acceptance

of the tragic vision in the first version is the sense here of *divinity* as compounded of grief, loneliness, and suffering. To romanticize a vision of the duality of the human condition to the point of considering the evil of the human condition as a divine part of the loveliness of the whole seems to me, philosophically, simply a cutting of the Gordian knot and, critically, in the context of the first *Sunday Morning* (and of Stevens' anti-romantic vision in general) discontinuous and, so, debilitating.[6]

The next added stanza (III in the final version) begins impressively:

> Jove in the clouds had his inhuman birth.
> No mother suckled him, no sweet land gave
> Large-mannered motions to his mythy mind.
> He moved among us, as a muttering king,
> Magnificent, would move among his hinds,
> Until our blood, commingling, virginal,
> With heaven brought such requital to desire
> The very hinds discerned it, in a star.

Jove was the right kind of god—inhuman and aloof—a close enough representative of Necessity. But desire demanded a human, sympathetic god, and so our blood, once strong, was thinned in the Christian attempt to mingle this desire with reality (figured in the star). But in truth our blood is "virginal," we are alone in the universe. This is a fine evocation of one poet's vision of the poverty of the human condition. What is bogus in context is the bravado of the questions and statement to follow which shout as if our poverty were a blessed thing:

> Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be
> The blood of paradise? And shall the earth
> Seem all of paradise that we shall know?
> The sky will be much friendlier then than now,
> A part of labor and a part of pain,

And next in glory to enduring love,
Not this dividing and indifferent blue.

The sky can never be so friendly as when people saw a heaven beyond it. The labor and pain of perishing love is certainly East of Eden, not preferable to it. And when the woman, the maidens, or the boys think of death rather than of April or earthly morning paradises, the sky will be as before a "dividing and indifferent blue." The questions in the stanza are rhetorical rousers which hide the pathos of our answer. Christianity, Stevens says above, brought "requital to desire," the desire of the brooding mind for permanence, which is precisely what the "men that perish" cannot requite in their chant to the summer sun:

And whence they came and whither they shall go
The dew upon their feet shall manifest.

We are asked more rhetorical questions in the last added stanza (VI in the final version), questions that demand obvious answers, answers which put us in the position of asking for, of all things, death, decay, and change:

Is there no change of death in paradise?
Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
With rivers like our own that seek for seas
They never find, the same receding shores
That never touch with inarticulate pang?
Why set the pear upon those river-banks
Or spice the shores with odors of the plum?
Alas, that they should wear our colors there,
The silken weavings of our afternoons,
And pick the strings of our insipid lutes!
Death is the mother of beauty, mystical,
Within whose burning bosom we devise
Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly.

The first nine lines intimate that all things we love and desire are made lovely and desirable by the fact that they decay and perish. This may well be so, (though one might ask whether it is not possible to conceive just as well the enjoyment of immortality, constant ripeness, and happy variations within permanence, as it is the insipidness of these: the argument of the insipidness of heaven to deny its existence is not without logical fallacy). But in any case, the tragic paradoxes in what we love and desire are not heightened, rather are debased by the last six lines in the stanza which intimate that death and change are better than permanence. Again the pretense of solving a problem by posing a paradox. The Gordian knot, the actual facing of evil, again is cut by this romantic adoration of the Process. Such an out concerning the tragic in the human situation is quite uncharacteristic of the urbane, skeptical, and ironic Stevens, whose tone elsewhere has rendered so well a very modern human dilemma, our isolation in a casual universe, and the ambiguity of our lives inescapably ending in darkness.

"So our weavings come undone, our lutes turn insipid. They are pathetic as answers. No matter, they are all we have." This would be Stevens speaking in his strongest and most self-ironic strain. He is that in the first version of *Sunday Morning*. He falters in the final version. What was in the first version a stand-off debate between two sides of the self is loaded in the final version by some uncharacteristic and discontinuous posturing. The greatness of Stevens as a poet lies in his poised and complex attitude towards the imaginative process and the human condition, consistently rendered in poems of the most delicate tensions. The final version of *Sunday Morning* does not manage that continuity of tone.

Cissy Caffrey cuddled the wee chap for she was awfully fond of children, so patient with the little sufferers and Tommy Caffrey could never be got to take his castor oil unless it was Cissy Caffrey that held his nose and promised him the scatty heel of the loaf of brown bread with golden syrup on. What a persuasive power that girl had! . . . None of your spoilt beauties, Flora MacFlimsy sort, was Cissy Caffrey. A truer-hearted lass never drew the breath of life, always with a laugh in her gipsylike eyes and a frolicsome word on her cherryripe red lips, a girl lovable in the extreme . . . she was sincerity itself, one of the bravest and truest hearts heaven ever made, not one of your twofaced things too sweet to be wholesome.

—The "Nausicaä" episode

*Cissy Caffrey:* I was in company with the soldiers and they left me to do—you know and the young man ran up behind me. But I'm faithful to the man that's treating me though I'm only a shilling whore.

—The "Nighttown" episode

# 6

# "Nighttown": Joyce's Ulysses

One of the above episodes obviously has the wrong angle on Cissy Caffrey. Or do both? Is the truth about the girl's character somewhere in between the two presentations? And does it matter?

The first passage is part of a section written from the point of view of a saccarine writer of young girls' novels. The second is part of an episode—the Nighttown phantasmagoria—where protean shifts in points of view occur, not primarily to explore characters in depth but to mock points of view implicit in various literary styles.

Cissy Caffrey, Leopold Bloom, and Stephen Dedalus are not characters consistently rendered. And yet the episodes in which they figure, and *Ulysses* as a whole, do have a continuity of tone. I think the case can be made that the continuity of the book lies

not in the author's desire for consistent fidelity to the conscious or unconscious minds of the several protagonists, or in a desire to create a specific vision, point of view, or attitude toward the human situation past or present (though both desires are apparent in the book), but in Joyce's attitude towards the joys of the medium, of making, of literary inventiveness. In trying to prove this case—to provide the tonal focus, the central attitudes of Joyce towards his materials—I do not want to appear to be denigrating or blinding myself to the great body of scholarship and criticism that deals with Joyce's other purposes. It is a matter of emphasis, a debate over what lies at the center, what at the periphery. I think that much *Ulysses* criticism has gone astray in often taking too literally what Joyce intended as brilliant play. Much of the "Nighttown" episode especially is not intended to reveal "truth" about characters at all, but to follow out parodic patterns in all their richness. In fact, we can trust information, biographical and psychological, about the characters *less* in this chapter than in any other of the book. The freedom in "Nighttown" is not in Joyce's finally unleashing the truths of his characters' libidos, but in giving his own literary fancies free rein.[1] That "Nighttown" does many other things, substantially, symbolically, is obvious; the limit of this essay is simply to try to distinguish the central impelling force of the episode and the book with some precision, on the premise that discussion of all else should start and flow from it.

The personages and the incidents of the first couple of pages in the "Nighttown" scene are obviously not actual. Everything in fact is quite artificial and stagy and is evidently staged in that mocking mind of Joyce for his and for our rather "decadent" literary pleasure (parody probably of surrealistic dramaturgy). The setting is not intended as an exteriorizing or objectifying of the drunken Stephen's mind as he stumbles into the red-light district. Very little (though certainly some) of the episode can be explained as fantasy in the minds of the characters. Most

of it exhibits the immensely fertile fancy of Joyce playing with materials from other parts of his big book. Cissy Caffrey is there in that wild opening scene not because it is true to her character to be in such a place, or because, say, Stephen imagines her there (he's never seen or heard of her), but because Joyce enjoys (as we do) the incongruity of having her there. Perhaps (most likely) the real Cissy Caffrey is most like that "good" girl of the "Nausicaä" episode—with some of the sugar removed—but it doesn't much matter, as the intentions of parody (of both the saccharine and the surrealistic style) are achieved in either passage. The problem of "truth" in parts of the "Nighttown" episode bothers us more with Leopold Bloom than with Cissy because we have come to know him intimately in the early chapters of the book. And so perhaps we do not react as acutely as Joyce expected to passages of parody of stream of consciousness in which Bloom figures. A too-literal reading of passages in "Nighttown" and a few in other episodes have caused, I feel, some critical misjudging of Joyce's Bloom.

After the mock-surrealistic overture to the episode, Stephen enters, drunk, with Lynch, and he is singing the "introit for paschal time." It is quite plausible that he should have done so. It is also quite possible that Joyce stagemanaged the singing to parallel Buck Mulligan's rendition of the same at the beginning of the book, and Father O'Flynn's (of the "Nausicaä" episode) at the end of "Nighttown." Edy Boardman's appearance (she also from "Nausicaä") at that moment however is purely Joyce's fancy and tells us nothing of Stephen's psyche (again, Stephen does not know her, and she couldn't be there and be that other Edy Boardman). From line to line in "Nighttown" we have the problem of deciding what Joyce intends us to take as (1) actual fact, (2) fantasy in the minds of his characters, and, most importantly, (3) his own literary fancy.[2]

Bloom appears "flushed, panting, cramming bread and chocolate into a side pocket." This we accept at face value. However,

"a concave mirror at the side presents to him lovelorn longlost lugubru Booloohoom" is obviously Joyce's own harking back to the techniques and epithets of the episode at the Ormond Bar ("Sirens"). It is not to be supposed that the play of verbal fancy is Bloom's (any more than the verbal play in "Sirens" is to be attributed to its characters). And further, the appearance now of the baby Tommy Caffrey is patently absurd, the possibility that Bloom would be thinking of the baby remote, the probability that the effect of the baby's presence pleased Joyce overwhelming.

So then when we come to the apparitions of people important to Bloom—his father, mother, and wife—we must be wary of reading too much into what is said and done, or of feeling that much about Bloom is being revealed. In part at least these appearances are used to mock such things as

1) ghoulish prose:

"with feeble vulture talons he [Rudolph Bloom] feels the silent face of Bloom"

2) clogged sentimental prose of the women's magazines:

[Ellen Bloom] ". . . in pantomine dame's stringed mobcap, crinoline and bustle, widow Twankey's blouse with muttonleg sleeves buttoned behind, grey mittens and cameo brooch, her hair plaited in a crispine net, appears over the staircase bannisters, a slanted candlestick in her hand and cries out in shrill alarm. 'O blessed Redeemer, what have they done to him!' "

3) the pulp oriental tale:

"Beside her mirage of datepalms a handsome woman [Molly Bloom] in Turkish costume stands before him. Opulent curves fill out her scarlet trousers and jacket slashed with gold. A wide yellow cummerbund girdles her. A white yashmak violet in the night, covers her face, leaving free only her large dark eyes and raven hair."

Bloom's wife speaks the magical words "Nebrakada! Feminimum," words neither she nor Bloom know, words which Stephen had read earlier and whose mispronunciation here on Molly's lips the reader finds exquisitely funny. (Bloom also speaks the shibboleth later.) I think it clear that Joyce does not intend us to forage in a symbolic jungle with these talismanic words (and yet of course this symbol hunting is just what has been done with them and with this book), or to feel that the characterizations of Bloom's parents and wife go much beyond the intentions of parody of the attitudes toward life that the pulp styles imply.

It is plausible that a befuddled Bloom might cull from his memory Bridie Kelly and Mrs. Breen, women out of his past, and Gertie MacDowell, his Nausicaä of a few hours back, but it is implausible that much of the imagery and dialogue which invest their appearances would occur to Bloom. A phrase of Gertie's "when you saw all the secrets of my bottom drawer," is built around a pun (he saw her drawers, he locks his bottom drawer at home), that Gertie couldn't make and Bloom wouldn't, in the situation. We would have to give Bloom credit for great inventiveness if, say, it were he who conjures up Mrs. Breen saying "*Voglio e non*"—or if it were he and not Joyce who sees his trip through "Nighttown" as a walk "on towards Hell's Gates," or imagines dogs constantly metamorphosing, Dignam as a dog, a castle as a pork kidney, himself set afire (by people whom he could not know, who chase him) or being brought to the executioner Rumbold. The metamorphosed Bello Cohen speaks of Bloom's "second-best bed," the phrase bandied about in the library debate with Bloom not present. It is ridiculous to go on multiplying examples of incongruous detail in Bloom's supposed fantasies. Such examples are rife, and Bloom is consistently incapable of dreaming up such associations.[3]

They are literary associations and they are Joyce's. They put Bloom into literary landscapes where he could not be at home, put him through paces and give him amusing attitudes

which offer little in terms of a probing in depth of Bloom. For a while we are in the world of *Sweets of Sin* (Love pulp with Signor Maffei) and then in that of *Matchem's Master Strokes* (detective pulp with Phillip Beaufoy) and Bloom is transformed accordingly (the chapter is patterned, after all, on Homer's Circe myth and her transformation tricks). New literary worlds come thick and fast—different sorts of pulp worlds, those of the New Testament, or of scientific, sociological, and evangelical tracts, into pornography, in and out of the Oxford and Irish movements, from the realistic to the fanciful, the sublime to the nauseous. Richard Ellmann among others points out in his biography of Joyce that many of the incidents of a Kraft-Ebbing nature in the interplay of Bella and Bloom find their parallel and obvious model in Sacher-Masoch's novel *Venus in Pelz* (and in fact a "Venus in furs" appears in "Nighttown"). The transitions from parody of one sort of literary matrix to another are myriad, instantaneous, and highly comic. We lose much of the piquancy of the humor if we try to force the kaleidoscopic changes into a pattern revelatory of Bloom's conscious or unconscious mind, or of his actual or wishful biography.

The enormous list of Bloom's perversions in the sequence with Bella Cohen is a case in point. The list is a result of Joyce's mocking extension of every known perversion onto Bloom's pathetic fetishes. The comic parade of bawdy visions is the product of Joyce's inventive daydreaming, not of Bloom's released frustrations. The taking-off point is a meagre actuality—Bloom wrote a lusty letter to Molly before they were married, he is writing now to the typist, he has not been able to make love to his wife for nine months (since daughter Milly reached puberty), he kisses Molly's rump, brings her breakfast, likes women's underclothes, etc. The comic exaggeration of actuality, of these minor foibles of Bloom, in the accusations of Mrs. Talboys, Bellingham, and Berry, of Bella Cohen and Buck Mulligan, are Joyce's sport and are intended more to mock the bawdy day-

dreaming of us all rather than to "expose" Bloom. It is a part of most of us to like pornographic literature, and through a parody of that literature we have one more important point of view from which to know man. Much as Swift uses Gulliver as a foil for various satiric thrusts at man, Joyce uses Bloom in this episode as a foil for various parodies to mock civilization's various points of view,—religious, social, political, ethical—as they express themselves literarily.

The contrast between what we truly know of the characters and of the literary fancies Joyce often weaves around them generates a great deal of pathos, both comic and tragic, and the separation—which in places will take some rereading—of what is actual from what is fanciful increases our pleasure in the book:

> Who comes through Michan's land, bedight in sable armour? O'Bloom, the son of Rory: it is he. Impervious to fear is Rory's son: he of the prudent soul.

Prudent Bloom is; impervious to fear he is not. The latter clause of the last sentence of the quoted passage is truth mocked, the former is mock error. The former is Joyce parodying heroic modes—"truth" of character joyfully sacrificed—in the latter Joyce is simply playing with levels of diction around that actual Bloom he has created elsewhere in passages of different modes. The passage quoted is in fact from one of those interspersed medieval-epic sections which are so amusingly counterpointed with the barfly's straight narrative point of view in describing the incidents at Barney Kiernan's pub. The passage and the episode as a whole epitomize the curious blend of cavalierness with and painstaking fidelity to the actual in Joyce's attitude toward his characters and the action. Somebody, Joyce seems to be whimsically saying, might have seen Bloom as fearless (and he *is*, rather, in the episode's denouement). Here as elsewhere Joyce is saying that it is both comic and pathetic how every point

of view (and every literary style) has its falsity as well as truth. All this is belabored, it is obvious, in the burlesque passage quoted above, but the point is, we must be on our guard for the same blend of "truth" and "error" in subtler passages in *Ulysses*.

Particularly deceptive is the question and answer form in the next to the last episode in the book. Queries like "What in water did Bloom, waterlover, drawer of water, watercarrier returning to the range, admire?" or, "With what meditations did Bloom accompany his demonstration to his companion of various constellations?" or "Which various features of the constellations were in turn considered?" elicit answers which in their (hilarious) range, depth, and articulateness are far beyond Bloom's capabilities. The answers are obviously Joyce's larking. The chapter has been treated as a mine for factual information with which to understand detail of episodes and characters elsewhere in the book, and it certainly does serve this purpose somewhat (and serves comically with answers coming after hundreds of pages of waiting). But it is also in itself an exquisite piece of comic art (it was Joyce's favorite chapter), and we do not get the full humor or the tone unless we see that in places Bloom and the "truth" are merely props for large ironic effects Joyce wishes to achieve.

The question, for instance, concerning Bloom's meditated leave-taking of Dublin and abandonment of his unfaithful wife ("Would the departed never nowhere nohow reappear?") is answered in terms which obviously should not be taken as Bloom's:

> Ever he would wander, self compelled, to the extreme limit of his cometary orbit, beyond the fixed stars and variable suns and telescopic planets, astronomical waifs and strays, to the extreme boundary of space, passing from land to land, among peoples, amid events. Somewhere imperceptibly he would hear and somehow reluctantly, suncompelled, obey the summons of recall.

> Whence, disappearing from the constellation of the Northern Crown he would somehow reappear reborn above delta in the constellation of Cassiopeia and after incalculable eons of peregrination return an estranged avenger, a wreaker of justice on malefactors, a dark crusader, a sleeper awakened, with financial resources (by supposition) surpassing those of Rothchild or of the silver king.

There is in the passage a mockery of bad narrative patterns; there is also a half mocking, half serious reaching toward a mythic mode, toward a feeling for endless Process, for the immense comicality and pathos in the position of "Everyman and Noman," for the inadequacy of any point of view of the Flux including the mythic. Myth does in a way illumine the "extreme boundary of space" but still some myths are pathetic all of the time, all myths some of the time. There is the incongruity of the myth with the people mythologized, and that of the mythic pattern with the chaotic detail of individual lives.[4]

Molly, a rather ordinary woman, is expanded in the last page of this episode into a Great Mother and Bloom is reduced to a seed in the Great Mother's womb. He is pathetic representative of all seeds in the Process, of all Sinbads wearily traveling through existence from that bright moment of first existence out of the dark chaos, or in Joyce's mock mythic language: "going to a dark bed there was a square round Sinbad the Sailor roc's auk's egg in the night of the bed of all the auks of the rocs of Darkinbad the Brightdayler."

Similarly the mythic is united with the mundane—the fanciful confusingly, almost inextricably, with the actual—in the great list of Molly Bloom's putative lovers. With any consideration the list is obviously fraudulent, representing neither literal truth nor Bloom's actual beliefs. A good number of the names listed are excluded by the nature of Molly's references to them in her soliloquy to follow, others are patently absurd, others exclude them-

selves by the natures of their bearers as exhibited in other chapters. The fact is that the list is in answer to a request for a "preceding series" of occupants of beds, but not of actual visitors to the real bed of Molly, or to any actual Molly:

> If he had smiled why would he have smiled?
>
> To reflect that each one who enters imagines himself to be the first to enter whereas he is always the last term of a preceding series even if the first term of a succeeding one, each imagining himself to be first, last, only and alone, whereas he is neither first nor last nor only nor alone in a series originating in and repeated to infinity.

The vision is mythic, the thought (of the infinite process of generation) is not Bloom's but Joyce's. The list perhaps is a wry selection of the infinite number of men who have desired Molly, or what Molly here represents.

The actual facts of Bloom's relationship with Molly are less spectacular, and are given on the last pages of this episode (and they too are full of literary mock). Complete physical and mental intercourse had obtained between the couple till their infant son's death ten years before. Physical intercourse using contraceptives had continued, with limited mental intercourse, till nine months before, when their daughter Milly had reached puberty. I think that if Molly's soliloquy is reread in the light of the above, the odds will appear in favor of the adulterous affair with Blazes Boylan in progress being Molly's first (though Bartell D'Arcy, Tenor, made free on the choir steps).[5] These bits of information however, these facts which are usually the core items of many novels, are certainly cavalierly treated and presented by Joyce. What is mocked here and elsewhere is the novel reader's stock anticipations for plot and character consistency and his obsessive concern with "truth" of statement about character or action.

Certainly this day, June 16, 1904, is not a day like any other

day (as criticism seems to make it) if it is the first day of Molly's actual unfaithfulness to Bloom. It is the day too of a moment of epiphany for Stephen—his "conquering" of his past and plunge into the future. This happens when he shouts "Non Serviam" and smashes the chandelier in the brothel. But there is such a strong mocking implicit in the melodrama of the scene, and such a matter-of-factness about Bloom's traumatic day, that important days and unimportant days seem much like one another—not to the protagonists, but to the artist and reader who in the book see life from so many points of view. Distinguishing relative importance of days is as important and as unimportant, the book seems to say, as distinguishing truth from error, the actual from the illusory, the mythic from the mundane. The continuity of *Ulysses* is in the continuity of the tone, the attitude of detachment from all points of view and all processes of distinguishing.

The last pages of the "Nighttown" episode have two great stage-managed effects: in Stephen's mad swirl and destruction and in Bloom's vision of his dead son. I think without question the reader gets the impression that something like Stephen's drunken experience actually occurred at Bella Cohen's. I think the same "right" reader gets the impression that the sober Bloom out on the street had nothing like the vision that ends the episode —that it is a comic, melodramatic effect that pleased Joyce. Yet it manages to generate even more honest pathos than Stephen brandishing his ashplant. So the implausible fancy of the author moves us more than the plausible act of the co-protagonist. Is this a mocking comment on the reader's susceptibility to maudlin melodrama? In part, no doubt—but concomitant with Joyce's detachment from obsessive points-of-view is his intimacy with the reader, where through incessant use of and parody of myriad literary styles (and the points-of-view concerning man and the world that they carry), he is always telling us about ourselves and of himself, of the joys and illusions and the discrepancies in the dreams of the very human dreamer. We all at times, he is saying,

prefer fancy to actuality: we keep coming back to the actual, keep flying to the joys of the imagination.

The book's continuity is then in the maintenance of the tone of detachment from fixed attitudes and of intimacy with the reader concerning the joys of literary inventiveness and illusions. The intimacy, to be sure, is built out of literary reflexes and hence is often very tenuous—we pretend to understanding and communication when we do not have them. But understanding of the mode grows, and sooner or later we care not about the truth of Cissy Caffrey (as we do care in the actual world) but about Joyce's manipulation of her. And so when, towards the end of the "Nighttown" episode, Bloom, quite out of character, shakes this Cissy Caffrey's shoulders and says, "Speak, you! Are you struck dumb? You are the link between nations and generations. Speak, woman, sacred lifegiver," we do not protest that either of the two Cissy's given us are inadequate to the mythic role—or that Bloom is inadequate to the speech. Joyce and his reader have come to intimate terms—both have had dreams of Cissy or her sort as Great Mother and as tramp—pathetic, comic dreams—and the detached recognition of them in the book pleases both.

# 7

# *Complex Irony in* Tom Jones

THE DISPARAGING OPINIONS about eighteenth (and most of nineteenth) century fiction in F. R. Leavis' *The Great Tradition* are bold articulations of postures which are prevalent today, though rarely held or expressed in so absolute a manner. The opinions revolve around the feeling that the books are not for the serious reader, that they are immature, superficial, and irresponsible in mode and substance.[1] Such charges never seem to be borne out in my reading experiences, but they come generally from intelligent people and therefore they need to be answered (though not in kind, by slurring adjectives) with an attempt at defining with some precision the complex tone and continuity of tone a sympathetic reader finds in them. Many of the disparagers of eighteenth-century fiction seem to me to be captives (so soon a slur!) of a developmental analogy to which they unconsciously subscribe, i.e. that artistic sensitivity to what

a novel should or should not be or do or attempt grows from an age of infancy to an age of maturity. *Don Quixote* "must be" the flower of another seed than the "novel" since it is too good too early and breaks all the rules. The analogy is typical of genre approach to criticism, and genre approach has built into its method a tendency towards falsification of the uniqueness of a work. It seems to me axiomatic that the nebulous qualities—depth, truth, responsibility, maturity—can be gained in myriad ways. That certain modes or certain sets of ideas can a priori generate these qualities better than others is a metacritical absolutism to which I cannot subscribe, though the position is very widely assumed. I see no reason to be patronizing to the modes of, say, humorous characterization, the obtrusive narrator, or the picaresque in action. Any mode can ultimately render imaginative constructs of experience very worth the having, when the reader will give himself up to the illusions of the mode in a continuous work of subtle tone. One ought not to sensitize oneself to the symbolizing power of one mode or one set of attitudes and be a carping literalist with others.

No one is patronizing to *Ulysses*, but this is not because the central attitudes of that mock-epic have been articulated very often with much precision. And, in fact, Joyce's central attitudes towards his medium—his detachment from philosophic systems and his intimacy with his reader concerning his craft—are very close to the attitudes which determine the structure of *Tristram Shandy* (see chapter Eight below). I want in this chapter to describe the subtle complex of attitudes which determines the structure of Fielding's *Tom Jones* and which belies not only the surface appearance of simplicity of attitude in the novel but also the simplistic critiques which this novel, along with others of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has too often elicited.

William Empson's response (in the *Kenyon Review*, Spring '58) to the tone of *Tom Jones* seems to me the subtlest and the

best we have. I have some qualifications of his view to offer here, but, as is usual in Empson's criticism, the article shows an appreciation for the uniqueness of a literary work (rather than its generic similarities to others) that I find hardly matched in twentieth-century criticism.[2] Empson's essay is in reaction to the widespread (often disguised) view in many quarters that Fielding's big book is in various ways superficial, that his plot, his characterization, his morality, his understanding of psychology or the human condition is that of an entertainer, and that he is smug in his limitations. Empson feels that the book is extraordinarily wise and subtle in tone. Though I agree with the assessment, I wish to argue about just what the tone of *Tom Jones* is.

"Double Irony" is Empson's term for what he considers Fielding's conscious, consistent attitude ("A") towards his characters, his material, and his audience, an attitude balanced between (and mocking both) the attitudes of the sentimental and the sophisticated reader ("B" and "C"), a stable position between or beyond benevolence and cynicism. I wish to maintain that ironies in the book are not consistently "double" (ironic always towards "B" and "C") but are "complex" (ironic intermittently towards "B" and "C" and "A," himself), and that for all the familiar confidence of Fielding the Narrator ("A"), the continuity of the book is in the drama of irresolution between the postures of "B" and "C." Said in another way, the characteristic switch from emotions of sentiment and involvement to detachment and skepticism in *Tom Jones* presupposes no stable posture in the narrator beyond both, but in fact is a fine (unconscious?) dramatization of the narrator's unresolved impulses towards both. The continuity that Fielding wanted to achieve (the impression of a comprehensive, coherent, ethical system) is perhaps not there in the book, but the lack is compensated for, it seems to me, by the continuity that is: that of a tremulous, extremely intelligent consciousness which is not at

all sure of itself, a consciousness with a strong impulse to love and to mock at the same time.[3]

We can find and specify this complex ironic tone in almost any passage of *Tom Jones*, so pervasive is it. The following is the first paragraph of Book I, chapter 2:

> In that part of the western division of this kingdom which is commonly called Somersetshire, there lately lived and perhaps lives still, a gentleman whose name was Allworthy, and who might well be called the favourite of both Nature and Fortune; for both of these seem to have contended which should bless and enrich him most. In this contention Nature may seem to some to have come off victorious, as she bestowed on him many gifts, while Fortune had only one gift in her power; but in pouring forth this, she was so very profuse, that others perhaps may think this single endowment to have been more than equivalent to all the various blessings which he enjoyed from Nature. From the former of these he derived an agreeable person, a sound constitution, a sane understanding, and a benevolent heart; by the latter, he was decreed to the inheritance of one of the largest estates in the county.

The two halves of the last sentence are characteristic Fielding, the first half a bit sweet, the second a bit tart. The first half does not exist so as to be demolished or undercut by the irony of the second half. The semicolon between is syntactically and emotionally correct; Fielding is both involved with and detached from Allworthy. He is partially of the persuasion of the "some" (those of good sentiment), partially of those "others" (of jaundiced eye).

The next paragraph is almost free of irony towards Allworthy; it is full of both sentiment towards Love, and of irony towards the great mob of humanity.

> This gentleman had in his youth married a very worthy and beautiful woman, of whom he had been extremely fond: by her he had three children, all of whom died in their infancy. He had

likewise had the misfortune of burying this beloved wife herself, about five years before the time in which this history chooses to set out. This loss, however great, he bore like a man of sense and constancy, though it must be confessed he would often talk a little whimsically on this head; for he sometimes said he looked on himself as still married, and considered his wife as only gone a little before him, a journey which he should most certainly, sooner or later, take after her; and that he had not the least doubt of meeting her again in a place where he should never part with her more—sentiments for which his sense was arraigned by one part of his neighbours, his religion by a second, and his sincerity by a third.

Fielding understands very well the jaundiced, skeptical, worldly posture which some of the neighbors take (and take wrongly in this case) because a side of his mind is of that sophisticated bent. And yet there is no doubt that he is taken by Allworthy's hopes. The three-thirds of the neighbors make up the whole of society, which doesn't leave much room for Fielding's responsive love and understanding for the fallible members of the mob. Fielding is always hard on humanity in the aggregate:

> Partridge having now lost his wife, his school, and his annuity, and the unknown person having now discontinued the last-mentioned charity, resolved to change the scene, and left the country, where he was in danger of starving, with the universal compassion of all his neighbours. (Bk. II, chap. 6)

His attitudes towards people are ever tremulous, flowing between the generous and the skeptical. We can laugh at Mrs. Wilkin's affectation in not wanting to see Mr. Allworthy in his night-gown, but can we laugh at her primping while Allworthy could be dying of apoplexy? We may laugh at her dislike of the baby Tom, but can we laugh when she, piqued at her bequest in Allworthy's will, declares, "No, I'll buy the gayest gown I can get, and dance over the old curmudgeon's grave in it." The sentimentalist in Fielding wrote the passages we can laugh at, the

skeptic those which give us a glimpse into an altogether darker well of the human spirit.

The presence of the two attitudes is demonstrable everywhere in the book. The sentimental side of the reader hates Dr. Blifil, the ironist in us cannot help but laugh *with* him as he listens to Allworthy's sermon ("Here Allworthy concluded his sermon, to which Blifil had listened with the profoundest attention, though it cost him some pains to prevent now and then a small discomposure of his muscles"—Bk. I, chap. 12). Allworthy's sermon here and elsewhere (and likewise Tom's sermons, and Fielding's sermons) are all admirable presentations of the sentimental position. But Fielding also mocks the position incessantly, as for instance when he entitles the chapter which contains Allworthy's fine sermon to Jenny Jones thus: "Containing such grave matter, that the reader cannot laugh once through the whole chapter, unless peradventure he should laugh at the author" (Bk. I, chap. 7). Similarly, one senses that Fielding is quite serious about those beautifully expressed pages on Love and on his Ideal of Active Christian Benevolence, but one perceives that the ironic side of his mind cannot help mocking the import of these same passages.

Fielding on Love:

> . . . there is in some (I believe in many) human breasts a kind and benevolent disposition, which is gratified by contributing to the happiness of others. That in this gratification alone, as in friendship, in parental and filial affection, as indeed in general philanthropy, there is a great and exquisite delight. That if we will not call such disposition love, we have no name for it. (Bk. VI, chap. 1).

Tom counseling the jaundiced man on the hill:

> "But you will pardon me," cries Jones, "if I desire you to reflect who that mistress and who that friend were. What better, my good sir, could be expected in love derived from the stews, or

in friendship first produced and nourished at the gaming-table? . . . I have lived but a short time in the world, and yet have known men worthy of the highest friendship, and women of the highest love."

"Alas! young man," answered the stranger, "you have lived, you confess, but a very short time in the world: I was somewhat older than you when I was of the same opinion."

"You might have remained so still," replies Jones, "if you had not been unfortunate, I will venture to say incautious, in the placing of your affections."

Fielding is, I am convinced, fully behind such passages, but cannot suppress his ironic knowledge that appetites-rather-out-of control are the dominant force in life. Tom for instance is now on his way to Mrs. Waters at Upton and Lady Bellaston in London, though he has Sophia on his mind. This see-saw process of action towards and reaction against, of involvement followed by detachment, is the continual movement of Fielding's mind and of his complex book. There is somewhere in the book a mock of every decorum, literary or philosophical—of an age for which decorum was a key concept—from an author who knew and respected the decorums, literary and philosophical, of his age and of the immense past. (Such an ambivalence of attitude towards decorum characterizes not only Fielding but most of the great writers of the Augustan age, and is one aspect of their complexity.)

Fielding as narrator presents himself both as the learned Augustan gentleman and as the lower class innkeeper, sometimes as sober lecturer and sometimes as clown or buffoon. He makes himself one of the mob, not worthy of an Allworthy, in:

Reader, take care. I have unadvisedly led thee to the top of as high a hill as Mr. Allworthy's, and how to get thee down without breaking thy neck I do not well know. However, let us e'en venture to slide down together.

But he distances himself from Allworthy's silliness, mocks Allworthy unmercifully in, for instance, the absurdly inapt epitaph Allworthy writes for Captain Blifil's tombstone (Bk. II, chap.9).

Fielding can mock his prefatory essays (over which he obviously labored) thus:

> In this light, then, or rather in this darkness, I would have the reader to consider these initial essays. And after this warning, if he shall be of opinion that he can find enough of Serious in other parts of this history, he may pass over these, in which we profess to be laboriously dull, and begin the following books at the second chapter. (Bk. V, chap. 1)

—not so much out of a desire to trap the slipshod reader (as Swift does through his hack persona, M. Scriblerus) as out of the awareness of the pomposity and pontificating the ironic eye could find in them. The switch from seriousness to self-mockery is almost a conditioned reflex with Fielding:

> Nor will all the qualities I have hitherto given my historian avail him, unless he have what is generally meant by a good heart, and be capable of feeling. The author who will make me weep, says Horace, must first weep himself. In reality, no man can paint a distress well which he doth not feel while he is painting it; nor do I doubt, but that the most pathetic and affecting scenes have been writ with tears. In the same manner it is with the ridiculous. I am convinced I never make my reader laugh heartily but where I have laughed before him; unless it should happen at any time, that instead of laughing with me he should be inclined to laugh at me. Perhaps this may have been the case at some passage in this chapter, from which apprehension I will here put an end to it.

Fielding's ambivalence is most clearly seen in his attitude towards his characters, his caring very much about them and his carelessness about them. We have spoken about Allworthy; let us look at some of the others, and first at the good squire's sister. How mixed our feelings must be about Bridget at the end

of the book! We have on the sentimental side her love for her child Tom (she cannot help kissing the baby to distraction), and also her love affair with the good student Summer ("a finer man . . . the sun never shone upon"). The affair with such a man (untimely snatched away) can only reflect credit on the feelings and basic goodness of Bridget. Yet Bridget is also presented as a prudish hypocrite with a fair share of sensuality beneath. The following lines concerning the stout scoundrel Captain Blifil are rather devastating to the view of Bridget as the good lover of the likes of Summer and Tom:

> His shape and limbs were indeed exactly proportioned, but so large that they denoted the strength rather of a ploughman than any other. His shoulders were broad beyond all size, and the calves of his legs larger than those of a common chairman. In short, his whole person wanted all that elegance and beauty which is the very reverse of clumsy strength, and which so agreeably sets off most of our fine gentlemen . . .
>
> Though Miss Bridget was a woman of the greatest delicacy of taste, yet such were the charms of the captain's conversation, that she totally overlooked the defects of his person. She imagined, and perhaps very wisely, that she should enjoy more agreeable minutes with the captain than with a much prettier fellow; and forewent the consideration of pleasing her eyes, in order to procure herself much more solid satisfaction.

That is, the agreeable moments, the "conversation," will be physical. His talk is probably indifferent, but his brawn is captivating. The two views of Bridget, the sentimental (with Summer) and the sophisticated (with the Captain) are not really resolved, they are simply presented. Fielding wants his sun and his darkness too. He is an opportunist with Bridget and with all his characters.

The same point can be made over and over again. We have mentioned Squire Western in the opening chapter of this book,

how the reader's attraction towards him is discouraged by the demonstrations of his absolute egotism; he would let his daughter be dishonored while he chased the fox (Bk. XII, chap. 2), he did hate his wife absolutely (Bk. VII, chap. 4), he can dance and mean it when he hears of Tom (who has crossed him) about to be hanged (Bk. XVII, chap. 3). Another case of the same sort—Mrs. Honour, Sophia's maid, whom for all her stupidity we rather like until she leaves Sophia to become Lady Bellaston's spy:

> These instructions, we are sorry to say, were communicated to her by Mrs. Honour, into whose favour Lady Bellaston had now so ingratiated herself, that the violent affection which the good waiting-woman had formerly borne to Sophia was entirely obliterated by that great attachment which she had to her new mistress. (Bk. XVII, chap. 8)

There is in such passages a sense that people are creatures of sheer impulse and interest, that the human condition is rather terrifying, and that only circumstances keep people from preying on one another. Similarly enveloped in an ultimately cynical atmosphere is Molly Seagrim, who can love Tom mightily but can also forget him quickly for a little money:

> Square was rejoiced to find this adventure was likely to have no worse conclusion; and as for Molly, being recovered from her confusion, she began at first to upbraid Square with having been the occasion of her loss of Jones; but that gentleman soon found the means of mitigating her anger, partly by caresses, and partly by a small nostrum from his purse, of wonderful and approved efficacy in purging off the ill humours of the mind, and in restoring it to a good temper.
>
> She then poured forth a vast profusion of tenderness towards her new lover; turned all she had said to Jones, and Jones himself into ridicule; and vowed, though he once had the possession of her person, that none but Square had ever been master of her heart. (Bk. V, chap. 5)

Fielding needs a healthy young girl early to make his point about Tom's natural animal spirits; he needs to make her a whore later to get Tom off the hook.

Consider Mrs. Waters, *nee* Jenny Jones, who is first presented as an ugly, scholarly, quite unsensual and long-time dutiful servant in Partridge's home and who later appears as a middle-aged nymphomaniac. She has left her nest with Captain Waters for the young blackguard Northerton, is overjoyed to strike up with Tom, but is willing to settle for the vile and wild Irishman Fitzpatrick. She will take Tom even as he is in jail bemoaning his loss of Sophia, will falsify her life story to the credulous Allworthy, and, absurdly, find another nest with Parson Supple.[4] The character of Mrs. Waters (and others similarly handled, like Black George) can be made consistent by supplying motivational apologies, as Empson tries mightily to do (Mrs. Waters, for instance, gives herself out of charity, not lust), but I don't think it worth the trouble. Fielding's desire is to be realistic about *life*, but it is not necessary that his *characters* be consistently rendered to do so if (as here) the mode does not demand it. Fielding is an opportunist with character who wishes to create a mosaic of secular parables (his mode), which ultimately convey to the reader Fielding's own complex set of attitudes towards life.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick delivers a long moral tale concerning the woes of marriage (Bk. XI, chaps. 4-7); there is no reason at the time not to accept it at face value: it represents Fielding's sentimental moral stance. But immediately, by reflex action as it were, Fielding begins to play with this sober lecturer till he has accomplished a complete reversal of the injured wife to intriguing adulteress. She has, it transpires, a knight who goes where she goes.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick cannot survive the devastating irony of passages like these:

> Sophia was soon eased of her causeless fright by the entry of the noble peer, who was not only an intimate acquaintance of

> Mrs. Fitzpatrick, but in reality a very particular friend of that lady. To say truth, it was by his assistance that she had been enabled to escape from her husband; for this nobleman had the same gallant disposition with those renowned knights of whom we read in heroic story, and had delivered many an imprisoned nymph from durance. He was, indeed, as bitter an enemy to the savage authority too often exercised by husbands and fathers over the young and lovely of the other sex, as ever knight-errant was to the barbarous power of enchanters; nay, to say truth, I have often suspected that those very enchanters with which romance everywhere abounds were in reality no other than the husbands of those days; and matrimony itself was perhaps, the enchanted castle in which the nymphs were said to be confined. (Bk. XI, chap. 8)

—But the good sense and decency of her sermon still stands.

Fielding the sophisticate loves the bawdy jest that he also disapproves of as he prints it. Here are Jones and Partridge concerning the sweet Nancy Miller's pregnancy:

> Jones expressed much concern at this news which Partridge endeavoured to relieve, by saying, with a smile, "He fancied the young lady was in no danger of death; for that Susan" (which was the name of the maid) "had given him to understand, it was nothing more than a common affair. In short," said he, "Miss Nancy hath a mind to be as wise as her mother; that's all; she was a little hungry, it seems, and so sat down to dinner before grace was said; and so there is a child coming for the Foundling Hospital."—"Prithee, leave thy stupid jesting," cried Jones. "Is the misery of these poor wretches a subject of mirth?" (Bk. XIV, chap. 6)

Sophistication and sentimentalism war with one another in the passage. It is hard for Partridge to recover as a sympathetic character in our eyes after passages like these, not because of his jesting but because of his lack of concern. It is hard for Jones to live as a character in the book not because his senti-

mentalism here and elsewhere is ridiculous, but because we have no real confidence, even at the end of the book, that Jones could resist a Molly or a Mrs. Waters or a Nancy for that matter, if circumstances were right. Fielding the sentimentalist tells us that he would resist, but Fielding the sophisticate smiles.

This is Fielding the sophisticate:

> It hath been the custom long established in the polite world, and that upon very solid and substantial reasons, that a husband shall never enter his wife's apartment without first knocking at the door. The many excellent uses of this custom need scarce be hinted to a reader who hath any knowledge of the world; for by this means the lady hath time to adjust herself, or to remove any disagreeable object out of the way; for there are some situations in which nice and delicate women would not be discovered by their husbands. (Bk. X, chap. 2)

But the man who wholeheartedly delights in Philosopher Square's deathbed letter is also Fielding:

> I have somewhere read, that the great use of philosophy is to learn to die. I will not therefore so far disgrace mine as to show any surprise at receiving a lesson which I must be thought to have so long studied. Yet, to say the truth, one page of the Gospel teaches this lesson better than all the volumes of ancient or modern philosophers. The assurance it gives us of another life is much stronger support to a good mind than all the consolations that are drawn from the necessity of nature, the emptiness or satiety of our enjoyments here. . . . (Bk. XVIII, chap. 4)

Everything turns out all right in the novel, but that is satisfying the sentimental *desire* in Fielding that the world be so. The skeptical, darker implications in the book are that in life, which has not the contrived (stage-managed) circumstances of the comic novel, all things will not turn out all right:

> There are a set of religious, or rather moral writers, who teach that virtue is the certain road to happiness, and vice to misery,

> in this world. A very wholesome and comfortable doctrine, and to which we have but one objection, namely that it is not true . . . [a doctrine] which we don't apprehend to be Christian, which we are convinced is not true, and which is indeed destructive of one of the noblest arguments that reason alone can furnish for the belief of immortality. (Bk. XV, chap. 1)

There is then a dualism in Fielding's mind between his attraction towards sentiment and that towards skepticism, a dualism which he tries to unify by Christian and benevolist answers. The attempt may be an impossible one, but it is honest to human desire. Stevens, in *Sunday Morning* resolves only rhetorically a similar problem of dualism in attitude towards life, by author's fiat, by simple denial, in those added stanzas, of the problem which the poem elsewhere poses. *Tom Jones* bristles with unresolved philosophic and psychological problems, but they are *the* problems, and Fielding does not hide them in the total texture of his work (which would be superficial if he did). William Empson better than anyone else saw that Fielding was dramatizing deep and large ambiguities of life in *Tom Jones*. He feels however that Fielding is in rather complete control of his attitudes: "double irony expresses imaginative sympathy for two codes at once." I sense irresolution in Fielding: the ironist is not confident that he knows the answers to the problems and paradoxes that his ironies have posed, and so he mocks what answers he has given. As with Milton's *Lycidas*, irresolution is the basis for the continuous drama of the book. The tone rendered, the continuity achieved, is complex, and characteristic Fielding.

As you proceed farther with me, the slight acquaintance, which is now beginning betwixt us, will grow into familiarity; and that, unless one of us is in fault, will terminate in friendship.—O *diem praeclarum!*—then nothing which has touched me will be thought trifling in its nature, or tedious in its telling. Therefore, my dear friend and companion, if you should think me somewhat sparing of my narrative on my first setting out—bear with me,—and let me go on, and tell my story my own way:—Or, if I should seem now and then to trifle upon the road,—or should sometimes put on a fool's cap with a bell to it, for a moment or two as we pass along,—don't fly off,—but rather courteously give me credit for a little more wisdom than appears upon my outside. (Bk. I, chap. 6)

# 8

# The Local Textures of Tristram Shandy

*Tristram Shandy* is a difficult book the first time around. The point, the tone, the meaning and attitudes of a particular page can give the reader trouble, and the reader with a low irritability quotient quickly shuts the book or skims the incomparable sections of dialogue in the Shandy household. When the tone of so many passages of the book is lost to the reader, when he is just reading words, he is tempted to find continuity or value only in the sections that are clear. It will happen too that when a sympathetic reader sees the point, catches the tone or attitude of a tricky passage, he will wax almost mystical about its significance. Neither reader is in a position to judge "continuity," that is, whether there is in the book a central body of attitudes that unify the whole. Explication of local textures in *Tristram* is then the necessary preliminary to valid critical articu-

lation of the continuity of the book. The present essay will attempt a few such explications and then an articulation, which, as with Joyce's *Ulysses* above, predicates a "play principle" as the dominant attitude of the author towards his material.

We need a *Tristram Shandy* commentary (even, I blush to say it, a variorum). But before such a commentary is prepared we need a good many more essays on local difficulties to feed that commentary. James Work's fine edition of *Tristram* (1940) annotates the people, places, and things, the historical, philosophic, and social background, but this is not what I am speaking of. Sterne's contemporaries had most of this sort of information, but the critical problems with local context were there then as now:

> "Perhaps if the Book has any fault at all," wrote a friend of Hall-Stevenson's after the opening volumes had been published, "it is, that some of [Sterne's] touches are too refined to be perceived in their full force and extent by every Reader."[1]

Alan Howes' *Yorick and the Critics* (1958) makes it clear that Sterne's earliest readers and readers since have had great difficulty following the logical movement of passages and comprehending a structural principle of the whole.[2] The only road to the latter is through the former. Let me then focus what I see as the sort of local problems involved in the criticism in *Tristram Shandy* by asking the reader to examine the following lengthy extract (from Bk. VIII, chaps. 2-4), and to make his own mental notes on the meaning (the attitudes) of the material before he reads my remarks about it.

> It is with love as with Cuckoldom—But now I am talking of beginning a book, and have long had a thing upon my mind to be imparted to the reader, which, if not imparted now, can never be imparted to him as long as I live (whereas the comparison may be imparted to him any hour in the day)—I'll just mention it, and begin in good earnest.

The thing is this.

That of all the several ways of beginning a book which are now in practice throughout the known world, I am confident my own way of doing it is the best—I'm sure it is the most religious—for I begin with writing the first sentence—and trusting to Almighty God for the second.

'Twould cure an author for ever of the fuss and folly of opening his street-door, and calling in his neighbours and friends, and kinsfolk, with the devil and all his imps, and their hammers and engines, etc., only to observe how one sentence of mine follows another, and how the plan follows the whole.

I wish you saw me half starting out of my chair, with what confidence, as I grasp the elbow of it, I look up—catching the idea, even sometimes before it half way reaches me—

I believe in my conscience I intercept many a thought which heaven intended for another man.

Pope and his Portrait are fools to me—no martyr is ever so full of faith or fire—I wish I could say of good works too—but I have no

Zeal or Anger—or
Anger or Zeal—

And till gods and men agree together to call it by the same name—the errantest Tartuffe, in science—in politics—or in religion, shall never kindle a spark within me, or have a worse word, or a more unkind greeting, than what he will read in the next chapter.

—Bonjour!—good morrow!—so you have got your cloak on betimes!—but 'tis a cold morning, and you judge the matter rightly—'tis better to be well mounted, than go o'foot—and obstructions in the glands are dangerous—And how goes it with thy concubine—thy wife,—and thy little ones o' both sides? And when did you hear from the old gentleman and lady—your sister, aunt, uncle, and cousins—I hope they have got better of their colds, coughs, claps, toothaches, fevers, stranguries, sciaticas, swellings, and sore eyes.

—What a devil of an apothecary! to take so much blood—give such a vile purge—puke—poultice—plaister—night-draught—

clyster—blister?—And why so many grains of calomel? Santa Maria! and such a dose of opium! periclitating, pardi! the whole family of ye, from head to tail—By my great-aunt Dinah's old black velvet mask! I think there was no occasion for it.

Now this being a little bald about the chin, by frequently putting off and on, before she was got with child by the coachman—not one of our family would wear it after. To cover the mask afresh, was more than the mask was worth—and to wear a mask which was bald or which could be half seen through, was as bad as having no mask at all—

This is the reason, may it please your reverences, that in all our numerous family, for these four generations, we count no more than one archbishop, a Welch judge, some three or four aldermen, and a single mountebank—

In the sixteenth century, we boast of no less than a dozen alchemists.

"It is with Love as with Cuckoldom"—the suffering party is at least the third, but generally the last in the house who knows any thing about the matter: this comes, as all the world knows, from having half a dozen words for one thing; and so long, as what in this vessel of the human frame, is Love—may be Hatred, in that—Sentiment half a yard higher—and Nonsense—no, Madam,—not there—I mean at the part I am now pointing to with my forefinger—how can we help ourselves?

First question: why must the thing be imparted now or never? Answer: because the thing is a comment on impulsive second sentences which *must* be demonstrated by the "impulsive" turning away from the first sentence. This is trivial and tricky enough, but it becomes effective as literature (in its paradoxicalness) as we come to see that this and all the seeming capriciousness to follow is actually very tightly controlled, that there is very little impulse and a great deal of careful artistry in the verbal fireworks. The "author" calling out the door for a critic is engaged in just such an analysis as I am now engaged in

("how one sentence . . follows another, and how the plan follows the whole") and he is doing only what Sterne in other passages calls whimsically upon the reader to do.[3]

"Tristram" makes himself ridiculous in the posture of intercepting other people's thoughts. He does not mind playing the clown (since the good reader will know the artist—see the headpiece to this chapter); what he dislikes is the hypocrite in literature or any walk of life (the "errantest Tartuffe") who pretends to special inspiration or special goodness. Pope's portrait shows the poet receiving inspiration from the gods—a type of hypocrisy. Others pretend to be full of "faith" or "fire" (which —if language is not to lie—really ought to be called "zeal" or "anger"). But till the world is as sensitive to hypocrisy as Sterne is (that is, never) he will (with his natural tolerance for lies in language and sentiment) speak pleasantly to all such (—Bonjour—good morrow!—etc.). They, on their "hobby-horses" (see Bk. I, chap. 7) and clad in their "mantles" (see Bk. 3, chap. 14) are living their squalid little lives, complaining of their ailments, and Sterne suffers himself to listen to them.[4] He swears (in sympathy or irony?) by his Aunt Dinah's mask, which she used to carry on her intrigues with the footman and which thus serves well as an emblem for the hypocrite's mask in general. The Shandy family like most families donned the mask for most of its generations (a "dozen alchemists in the sixteenth century"). But the mask (having got worn out from overuse) has not been used in recent generations (certainly not by those unhypocritical characters, Walter, Toby, and Tristram) and hence "we count no more than one Welch judge," etc.

The hypocrite ("*That*" vessel) is, too, the person who harbors hate rather than love in the heart ("*This*" vessel harbors love). The hypocrite's mind is on the groin (half a yard *lower* than the heart) though "she" calls it "nonsense." The person truly capable of pure love and sentiment (an Uncle Toby) does not mix "love" with "cuckoldom," or the mind and heart with

the groin (or call zeal and anger faith and fire). We fallen creatures (Sterne is one) do; the reader presumably does, the "hypocrite lecteur." Measured against Toby's purity we (author and reader) are as impure as hypocrites are impure compared to us.

Laurence Sterne, both in his pose of writing capricious nonsense and in his incessant double entendre is actually creating an amazingly contrived literary pattern in which the meaning of the pages is elicited only by understanding the pattern. This is the condition of poetry, and the extract demands the sensitivity and analysis which we usually reserve for good poetry. This is the condition of prose in works like *Ulysses*. It is a prose constantly calling attention to itself. It is a prose which embodies quite densely a complex welter of attitudes toward experience and art. Are the attitudes trifling (as F. R. Leavis or Wilbur Cross or George Saintsbury and others would have it[5]), or awesomely intelligent (as Goethe, Nietzsche, or Burckhardt see it)? My metacritical posture inclines me towards the latter view, but whichever, the point is that no opinion can be worth much that is based on an imperfect understanding of the attitudes or the transitions between attitudes in passages like the above.

The problem of understanding detail and tone comes up again and again, and what bothers one reader is often no difficulty for another, and vice versa. The following chapter (Bk. V, chap. 15) baffled my students, and I did not expect it to happen:

> Had this volume been a farce, which, unless every one's life and opinions are to be looked upon as a farce as well as mine, I see no reason to suppose—the last chapter, Sir, had finished the first act of it, and then this chapter must have set off thus.
>
> Ptr . . r . . r . . ing—twing—twang—prut—trut—'tis a cursed bad fiddle.—Do you know whether my fiddle's in tune or no?—trut . . prut . . —They should be fifths.—'Tis wickedly strung—

tr . . . a.e.i.o.u.-twang.—The bridge is a mile too high, and the sound post absolutely down,—else—trut . . prut—hark! 'tis not so bad a tone.—Diddle diddle, diddle diddle, diddle diddle, dum. There is nothing in playing before good judges,—but there's a man there—no—not him with the bundle under his arm—the grave man in black—'Sdeath! not the gentleman with the sword on—Sir, I had rather play a Capriccio to Calliope herself, than draw my bow across my fiddle before that very man; and yet I'll stake my Cremona to a Jew's trump, which is the greatest musical odds that ever were laid, that I will this moment stop three hundred and fifty leagues out of tune upon my fiddle, without punishing one single nerve that belongs to him—Twaddle diddle, tweddle, diddle,—twiddle diddle,—twoddle diddle,—twuddle diddle,—prut trut—krish—krash—krush.—I've undone you, Sir,—but you see he's no worse,—and was Apollo to take his fiddle after me, he can make him no better.

Diddle diddle, diddle diddle, diddle diddle—hum—dum—drum.

—Your worships and your reverences love music—and God has made you all with good ears—and some of you play delightfully yourselves—trut-prut,—prut-trut.

O! there is—whom I could sit and hear whole days,—whose talents lie in making what he fiddles to be felt,—who inspires me with his joys and hopes, and puts the most hidden springs of my heart into motion.—If you would borrow five guineas of me, Sir, —which is generally ten guineas more than I have to spare—or you Messrs. Apothecary and Tailor, want your bills paying,—that's your time.

We have presumably Tristram at the fiddle (his attitude and his language are his instruments, his sense of "harmony" guides his playing) tuning up between "acts" (milestones in his life) of a farce (his life). His sounds are vowels, his harmony is in his making music of life which is really discord. It takes some doing, and in any case is lost on the "listener" who has no "ear" ("the

grave man in black—'Sdeath"—who could in fact represent death or just an insensitive reader, perhaps a bad critic). The man with the bundle and the man with the sword (good citizens) respond to Tristram's harmony, but not the man in black. Tristram tries out first his sweet sounds (tw*a-e*, *i*, *o*, *u* -dle, diddle) and then discord (Krush-Krash-Krush), but can induce neither pleasure nor pain in the grave man. It is those responsive to harmony who know that "music" is cathartic and releases all the generous emotions of the soul (the tailor and apothecary must learn a style of delighting if they wish to be paid). Art then is "fiddling," but it is also very important.

One can explicate in this way because the chapter, which seems nonsensical at a glance, is made up of many leitmotifs to which the good "listener" should have become accustomed. There is enough new in the chapter to tantalize the good reader between recognition and bafflement, and this mingling of surprise and finally recognition is the effect desired (more of Sterne's toying intimacy later).

The idea (however flippantly expressed) that art is a harmonizing of life, not a depiction of it, that the orders and illusions of art make life tolerable, is central to Sterne's substance and structure:

> Attitudes are nothing, madam—'tis the transition from one attitude to another—like the preparation and resolution of the discord into harmony, which is all in all. (Bk. IV, chap. 6)

> —Writers of my stamp have one principle in common with painters. Where an exact copying makes our pictures less striking, we choose the less evil; deeming it even more pardonable to trespass against truth, than beauty. (Bk. II, chap. 4)

> —For he spake in the sweetest modulations—and took down his hat with the genteelest movement of limbs, that ever affliction harmonized and attuned together. (Bk. IV, chap. 16)

> . . . in my opinion, to write a book is for all the world like humming a song—be but in tune with yourself, madam, 'tis no matter how high or how low you take it. (Bk. IV, chap. 25)

—which brings us to my own leitmotif of continuity (which, sir, is where I have been heading all along). Continuity of attitude, the maintenance of comic and pathetic harmonies of artifice in the face of the disharmonies of life, is both aesthetic law and a way of living for Sterne.

Sterne it seems to me is much like Joyce in loving his medium of art, and in his strong sense of the absurdity of all fixed points-of-view of life (he has too the same talent for parody of the literary styles or rhetorics which convey the fixed perspectives). The "law," the "dynamics" which governs the movement of *Tristram Shandy* is, I would say, simply in the love of "doing" (so strong in Joyce), the joy that comes with fertility of inventiveness, and which enables the artist to harmonize in artistic prose the disorders of life. The communion that obtains with the reader depends as with Joyce on his being properly sensitive to the literary effects. After all the tonal essays on such literary effects as those analyzed above are in for that commentary, I think the book's continuity will be found in no special "keys" or "laws" tied to any special intention save that of "making," of weaving artistic orders out of the disorders of life, of serious "play." It seems to me that it is Sterne's comparative purity from intention that has made him through the years an "artist's artist" and here again the parallel to Joyce is obvious.

The continuity of attitude of the book, for instance, does not lie in a desire in Sterne to produce in prose the stream of consciousness or associative patterns of the mind of the narrator, Tristram. That is the illusion, the "ground rule" that Sterne and his reader accept. The movement from sentence to sentence, chapter to chapter, is so obviously artificial and artful, the "logical" links or transitions are so patently convenient and con-

trived (as in the passages analyzed above), that it is ridiculous to maintain that any mind moves naturally in these ways. The mind of the artist usually came up, most likely, with many suggestions for the "next modulation," and certainly most were discarded. And many that were not discarded immediately were expunged later to add piquancy to the game of the reader trying to follow the mock-logic from paragraph to paragraph. Quite often Sterne presents first the result of an action or a detail of an action, and then makes clear the action itself (so that the state of confusion is momentary only):

> This will not be explained the worse, for setting off, as I generally do, at a little distance from the subject. (Bk. VI, chap. 23)

We should take Sterne rather seriously when he says:

> What these perplexities of my uncle Toby were,—'tis impossible for you to guess;—If you could,—I should blush; not as a relation,—not as a man,—nor even as a woman,—but I should blush as an author; inasmuch as I set no small store by myself upon this very account, that my reader has never yet been able to guess at any thing. And in this, Sir, I am of so nice and singular a humour, that if I thought you was able to form the least judgment or probably conjecture to yourself, of what was to come in the next page,—I would tear it out of my book. (Bk. I, chap. 25)

This is not trifling but the lighthearted assertion of the fundamentals of music and poetry in combining the pleasure of surprise with the ultimate illusion of inevitability, in the creation of artfully contrived naturalness.[6] Sterne wants never to satisfy stolid expectations, but wants the reader at the same time to accept (or pretend to accept) the modulations as inevitable associative flow of the narrator's mind, that is, to play the game. It is still common to find in essays about the continuities of *Tristram* that Sterne wishes to represent the hero's capricious mental life or the narrator's whacky consciousness, but no one

seems easy with such formulations.[7] There are other formulations: that the continuity of the book is in the author's wish to persuade the reader to certain attitudes, by, say, using the forms of rhetoric to argue against them, or by parabolic projections of meaning to avoid the "gravity" of words (to paraphrase two of the best).[8] But it seems to me simpler, less warping, and less limiting to see Sterne not as a disciple to a special position about logic or words, but one, as Joyce, involved in the joy of making.

Coleridge felt rightly I think that with Sterne the "digressive spirit" was the very form of his genius; Sterne himself affixes to Book VII of *Tristram Shandy* (the long "digression" through France) the motto *"Non enim excursus hic ejus, sed opus ipsum est"* ("For this is no digression from it, but is the work itself"). Book VII is a good case in point for my sense of the continuity of the work. One can agree with several scholars who maintain that the trip through France was simply the easiest thing to write at the time, and yet feel that this doesn't matter. Nothing is digressive in Sterne's mode so long as it be well done; he has never led the reader to expect anything but playful digression and ellipsis. I don't think the critic can argue about the inclusion of Book VII, or of Slawkenbergius' Tale, or of the Story of Le Fever, for instance, only about whether the particular passage is effective. I hold no brief, say, for sections of Book VII, but the last chapter of the Dance in Provence, with its large mythic overtones and its collection of so many strands of attitudes in *Tristram*, is magnificent poetry to me. The joy in making exhibited in such descriptions as of the chestnut in Phutatorius' pants (Bk. IV, chap. 27), and in the mock-romantic tale of Amandus and Amanda (Bk. VII, chap. 31) is the ultimate reason for their inclusion—and this joy infects the reader. It can here, as in *Ulysses*, "set him free."

Much of *Tristram Shandy* is quite easily accessible; this essay has unfortunately not been concerned with those superlative, gem-like sections of character interplay that have always

been regarded as complex, magical symbols of human existence (by, for instance, Goethe, Coleridge, and Carlyle). My focus has been on those sections where the author with the attitude of love for his medium, and equally "aesthetic" posture towards life, plays with the literate reader. I think that once one feels or stops fighting (through understanding of the local texture) the continuity that Sterne has created for us in *Tristram Shandy*, the continuity of attitude found in those artists for whom fertility of literary inventiveness is a salvation of spirit, one can relish the art and intelligence of those less accessible sections much as one now relishes the similar literary fancies of Joyce. I do not wish to argue the metacritical value of the aesthetic posture towards life and art that Joyce and Sterne share (among many others); I wish only that this essay may help the reader to understand precisely what that posture is, and to see that it is continuous.

I doubt that anyone would really want to maintain that *Tristram Shandy's* length or action has any inevitability, that it could not be longer or shorter or any different than it is. Nor would one want to argue that episode in *Tom Jones* is other than contrived. But the point of the preceding is that if one's aesthetics will not allow an art work to exist so, then perhaps one's aesthetics are binding. This in the widest arena. In the narrower dens where we argue about topics like true and false novels, various purist doctrines are not obeyed by eighteenth-century fiction. Much of our time in "criticism" (better, "scholarship") indeed is spent in defining genera and measuring distances of works from those guideposts. The two unique works discussed immediately above seem to me to be subtly continuous; they seem to me too to be complex, effective, and significant. What I have said here about *Tristram* and earlier about *Ulysses* and my relating the two, should not lower the novels on anyone's scale. Nor do any such metacritical scales have any critical legal-

ity. I cannot justify any other "law" for any piece of fiction than that it maintain the attitudes, the postures towards art and experience that it creates, the modes in which these postures are presented: that is, that it be continuous in tone, true to itself. Criteria of "truth" or "realism" or "maturity" are metacritical not critical; dicta for modes to achieve metacritical values seem to me to have little meaning other than saying "I am sensitive to such-and-such a mode, wherein so-and-so has expressed values I love." We should not confuse love with modes of making love.

# 9

# *Shakespeare's Games with His Audience*

One could wait a lifetime to have his say on Shakespeare, and perhaps Shakespearean criticism would not be much the worse if one waited longer. But, all presumption aside, I wish in the few reflections that follow to try to do with Shakespeare only what I have tried to do earlier with Hopkins: to articulate with some precision a sense of a central continuity of attitude toward his medium over the range of his drama.

The major thrust of Shakespearean criticism two generations back was to demonstrate through historical methodologies that consistency of character and action was not a primary concern with Elizabethan dramatists. The major thrust of the recent generation of criticism seems to me to be that continuity in a Shakespeare play is maintained in the language itself, and in the associative patterns formed by the imagery. Both approaches

have generated useful results, have added to the sum of insights into Shakespeare's artistry. Both too have exhibited the weaknesses at their extremes—in the former a tendency toward an excessive literalism; in the latter toward an excessive impressionism in dealing with problems of character and of action. What I propose below is an approach to tone which is predicated on a flexibility and resilience in Shakespeare's audience, an approach which may help free the conscientious reader from either a debilitating historicism or an easy mythologizing, and enable him to justify with some precision effects in the plays that he has found labeled as discontinuous, primitive, or poor.

The opening remarks of this book (and *passim*) concern audience psychology: how the fundamental and perhaps only demand of an audience is continuity of mode; how very flexible and subtle the mind is in adapting to a unique mode and tone. The mind does not balk at fairy tale modes, at either simplistic or complex visions, attitudes, or techniques, but at discontinuities, at rapes of created Cinderellas. I find the characteristic tone, attitude, of Shakespeare in a familiarity with his audience that allows him to create a core situation or action and then to feel free to move back and forth from the dramatic illusion to a rather choric posture with his audience toward it—to have his actors deliver lines that modulate between involvement in the core illusion and detached meditation on it. Shakespeare's characteristic tacit agreement with his audience is that he, they, and the actors are all to maintain a state of suspension half in the play's action, half out of it, to allow the characters or the actors to flit back and forth at a speech, at a line, at a word or gesture, from the world of the dramatic illusion to the audience's real world. Shakespeare thus is never a slave to his dramatic illusion nor is he often really unfaithful to it. He is able to explore more fully the wider implications of any theme or situation that is impelling his core action, and to take the audience along with him in his meditations. I feel that the modulations from illusion to

reality are easily caught by an audience at home in its social milieu as was Shakespeare's and as are indeed most theatrical audiences.[1]

To cases. What are we to think of the Juliet of these mildly surprising witty lines:

> Come, cords; come, nurse; I'll to my wedding bed;
> And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead.

There are all sorts of explanations. It can be said, and truly enough, that Elizabethan audiences enjoyed rather out-of-character bawdry from the women characters, or that having men or boys playing women's parts would naturally influence a poet's choice of metaphor, or that the Elizabethan was a lusty age where women spoke freely of their maidenheads, or, perhaps, that Shakespeare could not resist a chance for wit and rhetoric at the expense of character consistency (wit, rhetoric, and/or the expression of rather straightforward moral themes, with a little sensation and spectacle to season, being the Elizabethan conventional recipe).[2] Or from the opposite critical quarter, it might be asserted that Victorian romantics couldn't see the truly lusty, sensual, witty, selfish, bright, and domineering woman that Juliet is for that sweet, loving, and fainting maiden they wanted: she part of a system of symbols or a mythic pattern conveyed *through* the language and *despite* the plot. What is maddening in Shakespearean criticism is that one feels that there are elements of "rightness" in this latter view as in the other—though one is easy with neither of them. The former approach lies grounded in "fact," the latter flies away on the wings of imagery.

I wish to recommend the middle-air. Juliet, I would say, is stepping out of character when she delivers those lines; Shakespeare expects the audience to sense the switch and the audience does. The actor, through myriad choices of inflection or gesture, slips out of the dramatic illusion to deliver the witty line. From

this perspective Juliet *is* a sweet young girl, and rather incapable of the rhetoric of, say,

> O nature, what hadst thou to do in hell,
> When thou didst bower the spirit of a fiend
> In mortal paradise of such sweet flesh?
> Was ever book containing such vile matter
> So fairly bound? O, that deceit should dwell
> In such a gorgeous palace!

Or the manly metaphysical wit of

> if love be blind,
> It best agrees with night. Come, civil night,
> Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,
> And learn me how to lose a winning match,
> Play'd for a pair of stainless maidenhoods.
> Hood my unmann'd blood, bating in my cheeks,
> With thy black mantle, till strange love grow bold,
> Think true love acted simple modesty.

But the actor-as-Juliet, or the audience-in-love-with Juliet, or Shakespeare carrying on a running monologue with his audience, all *are* capable of the reflections. The reflections are perhaps not true to the Juliet impressed in our hearts, but are true to "our" (the choric sense in the audience) ideas of the world with Juliets in it. And in this kind of intimate author-audience interplay that is the only truth that matters. We have a Juliet rendered who is a continuous character, but that is not the Juliet of all the lines given her name. It is wrong, it is warping, it cuts across the grain of innumerable reactions to the plays to say that Shakespeare does not create characters that impress us as real and consistent, that there is not a real, consistent Juliet in the play. It is just as wrong to say that the true Juliet is the sum total of all the implications of her imagery and rhetoric in the play. There is the Juliet in the "core" drama of the play,

and then there is the comment, the meditation, the rhetorical or witty counterpointing (by "Juliet" herself and others) upon that core. The actors, the audience, and the author engage in such games with the core drama and are able to consider a much wider range of response to the dramatic situation than is offered in a more limited, less intimate mode.

Surely all readers of *Romeo and Juliet* realize that lines like the following are not Juliet, though Juliet's, that the one passage is true to her love, the other true to her fear, but that the expression is Shakespeare's, is ours:

> O, for a falconer's voice
> To lure this tassel-gentle back again!
> Bondage is hoarse, and may not speak aloud;
> Else would I tear the cave where Echo lies,
> And make her airy tongue more hoarse than mine,
> With repetition of my Romeo's name.
>
> O, if I wake, shall I not be distraught,
> Environed with all these hideous fears,
> And madly play with my forefathers' joints,
> And pluck the mangled Tybalt from his shroud,
> And, in this rage, with some great kinsman's bone
> As with a club, dash out my desperate brains?

We want when we come to passages like these neither to denigrate Shakespeare's ability to create and maintain character by calling them examples of "primitive" conventions of "direct speech" which we can only endure, nor to necessarily attribute the knowledge of falconry or the mordant wit to Juliet. We do not have in Juliet (and rarely anywhere in Shakespeare) an inconsistently drawn character in a conventional Elizabethan melodrama, but a consistent character within a core drama *constantly observed and commented on in the larger drama.* Shakespeare's plays are more than conventional Elizabethan melodrama by virtue of his control in maintaining his constant, con-

fident, familiar posture with his audience, and this confidence *is* his unique attitude or tone. What we find we have damned in character and action in other dramatists (in Marlowe, Webster, Dekker, Kyd, for instance), we feel to be continuous in Shakespeare because he and we together are, at one and the same time, watching an inner play and also carrying on a meditative dialogue on that play's wider implications, both ironic and philosophic. The almost unfailing maintenance of this tone, this confidence, this controlled intimacy, is what can bring even the most ambitious of critics in a rhapsodic moment to deny the validity of all negative criticism of Shakespeare:

> However inferior in ability I may be to some who have followed me, I own I am proud that I was the first in time who publicly demonstrated to the full extent of the position, that the supposed irregularity and extravagances of Shakespeare were the mere dreams of a pedantry that arraigned the eagle because it had the dimensions of the swan. In all the successive courses of lectures delivered by me, since my first attempt at the Royal Institution, it has been, and it still remains, my object, to prove that in all points from the most important to the most minute, the judgment of Shakespeare is commensurate with his genius—nay, that his genius reveals itself in his judgment, as in its most exalted form.
>
> (S. T. Coleridge,
> "Shakespeare's Judgment Equal to His Genius")

I do not wish to try to maintain Coleridge's position, but only to persuade the reader that many of the debates concerning character, action, and meaning in Shakespeare are imprecise and warping essentially because of a failure on the part of scholars, critics, directors, to establish *tone*, to have some "feel" for when a character is speaking quite in character and when somewhat out, when an action on the stage is intended to further the dramatic illusion, when to serve rather as "our" (Shakespeare's and his audience's) comment or meditation on the illusion.

Prince Hal's first soliloquy, for example, at the end of Act I, scene 2 (*Henry IV, Pt. 1*) tends to shock the reader. Hal has just engaged in some appealing banter with Falstaff and Poins, and now they are gone:

> I know you all, and will a while uphold
> The unyok'd humour of your idleness.
> Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
> Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
> To smother up his beauty from the world,
> That when he please again to be himself
> Being wanted, he may be more wond'red at
> By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
> Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.
> If all the year were playing holidays,
> To sport would be as tedious as to work;
> But when they seldom come, they wish'd for come,
> And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents.
> So when this loose behaviour I throw off
> And pay the debt I never promised,
> By how much better than my word I am
> By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;
> And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
> My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
> Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
> Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
> I'll so offend, to make offence a skill
> Redeeming time when men think least I will.

The soliloquy, if taken as Hal's actual thoughts at the moment, is preachy and pompous; Hal appears a dissimulator, very vain, a false friend, an opportunist, and a self-dramatist. The situation of having a man who despises low life living it so well impresses one as quite implausible. Hal looks no better in his remarks over the body of Falstaff (who is apparently dead):

> What, old acquaintance! could not all this flesh
> Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell!

I could have better spar'd a better man.
O, I should have a heavy miss of thee
If I were much in love with vanity!
Death hath not struck so fat a deer to-day,
Though many dearer, in this bloody fray.
Embowell'd will I see thee by and by;
Till then in blood by noble Percy lie.

The same callousness and inappropriate wit (if all be taken literally and seriously) mark Hal's leave-taking of Falstaff in Act V, scene 5, of *Henry IV, Part 2*:

I know thee not, old man; fall to thy prayers.
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!
I have long dreamt of such a kind of man,
So surfeit-swell'd, so old, and so profane;
But, being awak'd, I do despise my dream.
Make less thy body hence, and more thy grace;
Leave gormandizing; know the grave doth gape
For thee thrice wider than for other men.
Reply not to me with a fool-born jest.
Presume not that I am the thing I was;

Pompousness at the least fills his speech at Shrewsbury:

Lead me, my lord? I do not need your help;
And God forbid a shallow scratch should drive
The Prince of Wales from such a field as this,
Where stain'd nobility lies trodden on,
And rebels' arms triumph in massacres!

And yet for all this, my sense of the common reaction to Hal is that we all feel we know the real Hal: he is the bright, human, witty banterer of the Boar's Head Tavern scenes. *There* is the consistent character, Prince Hal—the rest is something else, something (strangely enough) not at all destructive to Hal. Hal is not the discontinuous series of fragments of conventional characters that literal reading could make him, or a study in the

psychology of an incipient tyrant that impressionistic study of the imagery might create. That first soliloquy is, like so many of Shakespeare's soliloquies, choric wisdom, that which the audience thinks it ought to feel, expressed in language it would like to command. No doubt but that the Prince, like the audience, accepts this choric wisdom in a part of his mind; so that the soliloquy *is* half in character, but it is not at all right for that time or place or in such diction. The passage of the "dear" and "deer" is pure wit, the audience relishes it as its own, not as Hal's. The passage "I know thee not, old man" is half choric wisdom, half choric wit. There are ways in which it can be seen as Hal's (as tongue-in-cheek, as pretense in front of his new subjects, as a conventional Elizabethan switch-of-character, or as a further insight into a singularly self-centered mind) but one is constantly forced to create new rationales for new passages if one does not sense that Shakespeare modulates in such passages back and forth between the world of his dramatic illusion and the "real" world. It seems to me profitless and deceiving to explain Hal's apparent bravado at Shrewsbury as anything other than the audience-eye-view of what a Prince should "be" (not "say"). I think further it is just as wrong to find Shakespeare's artistry less because such comment comes from the actor playing Hal himself. The tone allows for this, the audience expects it. We must, it is true, exercise our historical as well as critical imagination to recapture the tone of such passages, but in doing so we enter into a strange, new, and bracing relation, a remarkably familiar relation to an author. And most magically, through this relationship we are brought to a sense of temporary confidence that we have the same control and understanding of experience that our author has.

There are all sorts of apparently "primitive devices" in *Richard III*: incredible melodrama in the action, ridiculous inconsistencies in character, wildly implausible rhetorical patterns. And yet that tone of Shakespeare's—he and the audience and

the actors being constantly in and out of the core drama—has enabled generations of spectators to sense the knowledge of human action and motivation beneath the artifice.

Richard says in the early lines of the first scene:

> Since I cannot prove a lover
> To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
> I am determined to prove a villain . . .

But then just a bit later in the same scene he determines contrarily to woo and win the widow Anne:

> What tho I kill'd her husband and her father?
> The readiest way to make the wench amends
> Is to become her husband and her father

and, wonder of wonders, the wooing by an admittedly ugly man of the woman who hates him most proceeds from impossibility to attainment all in the second scene:

> Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
> Was ever woman in this humour won?
> I'll have her, but I will not keep her long.
> What! I, that kill'd her husband and her father,
> To take her in her heart's extremest hate
> With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
> The bleeding witness of my hatred by;
> Having God, her conscience, and these bars against me,
> And I no friends to back my suit withal
> But the plain devil and dissembling looks,
> And yet to win her, all the world to nothing!

Still the audience does not laugh, rather is moved, and recognizes the psychological pattern that Shakespeare has represented by shorthand means in the two opening scenes. Anne is not so virtuous as her rhetoric, she is susceptible to being attracted by the Richard that exists between the lines of his implausible (choric) rhetoric. Hatred turned to desire, egoism come to be

fascinating, are patterns of action, *mythoi*, that Aristotle (and certainly psychiatry) would approve. Such is the stuff of the core drama in the Shakespearean mode. The audience however is at least as interested in the detached choric author-actor comment on these patterns of life as he is in their highly stylized representation. The following passage is quite obviously less than half Richard, more than half choric comment—

> Hath she forgot already that brave prince,
> Edward, her lord, whom I some three months since
> Stabb'd in my angry mood at Tewksbury?
> A sweeter and a lovelier gentleman,
> Fram'd in the prodigality of nature,
> Young, valiant, wise, and no doubt, right royal,
> The spacious world cannot again afford.
> And will she yet abase her eyes on me,
> That cropp'd the golden prime of this sweet prince
> And made her widow to a woeful bed?

—but the passage is, and this is the major point of my remarks, none the worse thereby. Richard, half in character and half out, is serving more than one dramatic purpose here, and the audience seizes the fact with no trouble.

The point is perhaps becoming tedious through repetition, but it is, I think, fundamental. It is hard to keep the fundamental continuity of Shakespeare's mode in mind when attractive bits of "fact" or imagery in context glint for the critic. We must keep foremost in mind that for Shakespeare, for his actors, and for his audience, there is the play and then there is the meditation, the dialogue about the play. There is the ever present danger of the critic's adopting either a superior or an overly impressionistic attitude towards a moment in a play if he does not sense that tone of play-and-no-play. Witness Iago condemning himself:

> I have't. It is engend'red. Hell and night
> Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light . . .

Divinity of hell!
When devils will the blackest sins put on,
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
As I do now . . .

Othello praising himself:

'tis the plague of great ones;
Prerogativ'd are they less than the base.

Henry IV doing likewise while advising his son to avoid the ways of Richard II:

He was but as the cuckoo is in June
Heard, nor regarded; seen, but with such eyes
As, sick and blunted with community,
Afford no extraordinary gaze
Such as is bent on sun-like majesty
When it shines seldom in admiring eyes . . .

Benedick witty about himself even when there is no one listening:

Shall quips and sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humour? No, the world must be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married.

Romeo, about to poison himself in his grief, philosophizing to the apothecary about the wickedness of money:

There is thy gold, worse poison to men's souls,
Doing more murder in this loathsome world,
Than these poor compounds that thou mayst not sell.
I sell thee poison; thou hast sold me none.

Queen Gertrude presenting a little dissertation on bawdry while describing Ophelia's death in the river:

There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them . . .

The list could be compounded enormously, but from such and others like these, definitive interpretations of the plays in which they appear have been promulgated—postulating, say, a schizophrenic Iago, a self-dramatizing Othello, a paranoid Henry IV, a Benedick completely self-unaware, a pattern concerning true and false gold in *Romeo and Juliet*, and every sort of Gertrude. And there are so many other theses about such passages and the plays—some more dubious, more partial, more limiting—including, of course, those which find the passages merely blemishes. I do not wish to take up these specific cases here, but only to stress generally that we must not, if we want to be precise about Shakespeare's plays, overextend our interpretations of the characters and fables as they exist in that core dramatic illusion from which Shakespeare works. When we speak of "character" in Shakespeare we should perhaps be speaking of that good Othello, that dashing Hal. But, no question, the total vision of a play is complexified, deepened, darkened, made ironic or cosmic when Shakespeare invites his audience to look at life from a wider field than the context of the inner play. Hence the immense scope of the "out-of-character," the "out-of-dramatic-context" language of the great tragedies of the middle period.

Hamlet's melancholia, for instance, is not to be thought of as in any way compounded by the behavior of lawyers and politicians when Shakespeare has him say to us:

> For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
> The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
> The pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay,
> The insolence of office, and the spurns
> That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
> When he himself might his quietus make
> With a bare bodkin?

Or Lear's madness compounded by those injustices in civilization which he denounces thus:

Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!
Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thy own back;
Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind
For which thou whip'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.
Through tatter'd clothes great vices do appear;
Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sins with gold
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.

Or by the lechery of women:

Behold yond simp'ring dame,
Whose face between her forks presages snow
That minces virtue, and does shake the head
To hear of pleasure's name,—
The fitchew nor the soiled horse goes to't
With a more riotous appetite.
Down from the waist they are Centaurs,
Though women all above;
But to the girdle do the gods inherit,
Beneath is all the fiends';
There's hell, there's darkness, there's the sulphurous pit,
Burning, scalding, stench, consumption, fie, fie, fie! pah, pah!

These extensions of Hamlet's wound and Lear's hurt are not dramatically theirs, but Shakespeare's further exploration into the attitude of despair at the corruptions of the human spirit, an exploration which he wishes to have the audience make with him. Hamlet's situation, Lear's situation serve as springboards for such extensions of vision. The "audience" (those sensitive to the mode) accept the extensions as true-in-spirit, and do not wonder if perhaps Lear has lived with a sexual problem or if part of Hamlet's despair is not sociological and connected with the class struggle.

Neither would the critic who is in-on-the-game want to run a psychological analysis on the mad Ophelia when she sings:

Young men will do't, if they come to't;
By Cock, they are to blame.

"Quoth she, 'Before you tumbled me,
You promis'd me to wed.'
'So would I ha' done, by yonder sun,
An thou hadst not come to my bed.' "

Or to feel that she has acute psychological insight when she distributes her flowers:

> There's fennel for you, and columbines; there's rue for you, and here's some for me; we may call it herb of grace o' Sundays. O, you must wear your rue with a difference. There's a daisy. I would give you some violets, but they wither'd all when my father died.

In the one instance the audience realizes that Shakespeare is using Ophelia temporarily to attack the uncleanliness of Gertrude (the pathos of it in the mouth of Purity!), in the other to aggravate the guilt feelings of King and Queen (the ironies of Chance!). The audience recognizes the contrived pathos, the contrived irony, but accepts them as devices to obtain the confrontation of Guilt with Purity and Accident.

Shakespeare, I have been asserting, is allowed through his relation with his audience to have a character speak out-of-character or out of the dramatic situation or to present a situation both implausible and contrived, while not disturbing one's sense of continuity. I would like now just to touch on a few more tenuous cases-in-point where a sense of that relationship of the part to his audience may help toward a clarification of Shakespeare's attitude toward a specific character or action. What, for instance, are we to make of the first scene of *Lear*? When Lear makes those foolish demands for panegyric from his daughters, are we to see him as a senile, ridiculous tyrant who gives his daughters cause, or are we to take the noble Kent's praising of Lear and damning of the two wicked daughters as gospel? Prob-

ably the truth is simple and close to the latter. The Elizabethan audience, one may assume, took Lear's demand as an author's device or convenience to be able to dramatize the responses of two bad daughters and one good one. To take Lear to task too much is inimical to the mode of the inner fable; he *is* a man "more sinned against than sinning." The purpose of the inner core drama of *King Lear* is to render the Shakespearean vision of the weakness of Humanity confronted by its enemy Inhumanity. It is true however that in Act Three the widening of Lear's tragic vision in the "outer" meditations almost overwhelms our sense of the simpler King Lear of the inner play. Yet we feel finally that the Lear of the cosmic meditations is at least a harmonious extension of the other Lear and his situation.

*Hamlet* is more than kin but less than kind to *Lear*. One has the feeling in *Hamlet*, as in *Lear*, that for Shakespeare, the rendered vision of a world—the world-weariness, the savage irony of the outer reverie—was the true motivating force of the play. In the inner play, such as it is, we have Hamlet the revenger, the swordfighter, the witty Osric-baiter—a believable Revenge hero. The meditative Hamlet stunned by the disillusionment with his mother is hardly consistent with that hero, and yet the meditations of the outer play constantly flow from this disillusion and overwhelm in space and power the action of the revenge play. There is thus a feeling of imbalance in *Hamlet*, a sense of the whole play being really in the outer play, in the philosophic dialogue with the audience, and also a sense of disharmony between the Hamlet of the inner drama and that of the outer. Lear has that same imbalance perhaps, but not that disharmony.

It is possible to argue that the attitude of Prospero the Magician-Artist in *The Tempest* as he muses rather detachedly upon the action and intrigues of the inner core play so dominates the whole as to kill any real interest in the intrigues. Prospero is supposedly fighting his enemies on the island (Caliban's group and Antonio's group) and arranging life for his daughter, but

there is no dramatic tension in these complications at all. They exist, it seems, to provoke Prospero's meditative comments, to give us the Prospero of the passages, "Poor worm, thou art infected," "Our Revels now are ended," and "Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves," the Prospero who counters his daughter's "O brave new world" with "'Tis new to thee." We, the audience, are so conscious of the outer play's meditation upon the relations of art, the moral life, and death, so patent are the meditative devices (the Ariel-Caliban contrast, the contrast of the whiskey-foolery of Caliban and the rascals with the true evil of Prospero's other enemies, the contrasting of age and youth in Prospero and his daughter Miranda, and the obvious moral import of the two ballet-pageants), that we have little doubt that the action of the inner play is rather completely controlled by the meditative intention of the outer rather than the outer meditations flowing from the inner fable. Shakespeare's games with his audience allow him to expand or augment implications of his core action, but here in *The Tempest* and in *Hamlet* we sense the meditation *vis à vis* the audience as the whole *raison d'être* of the play.

The *Winter's Tale* is a play which for three acts develops a strong core action and then modulates into wide philosophic and aesthetic meditations (of the *Tempest's* sort rather than *Lear's*) in the last two acts. The modulation is achieved through stage effects which can seem awkward without a sense of the Shakespearean tone of intimacy with his audience, of the willing state of suspension of the audience half in the inner play and half out of it. The Bear which pursues Antigonus at the end of Act III ushers in the new wider mode. We are told by historical critics that there was a Bear available next door to the Globe Theatre at the time—as if this made its use by Shakespeare mandatory or irresistible. More likely it was simply convenient. Shakespeare, it seems to me, wanted a switch from inner to outer mode to be wide, abrupt, and complete. The greatly altered

perspective is organic to his theme. There are represented in the *Winter's Tale* antithetical ways of seeing the world: Leontes' venal, small, loveless, paranoid vision, and the fruitful, expansive, joyous vision of pastorale. The Bear and the figure of Old Father Time make sport of the violence, decay, and death of the first three acts and the sixteen years intervening. Innocence and virtue, repentance and generosity of spirit are made timeless and gay in the last two acts. Reality is no such sport and Time does not stop, but the play asks the audience to suspend its sense of reality for a while to see what the artifices of illusion can do for the spirit.

The triumph of artifice in the play is of course the repentant Leontes' kissing the statue of his wife and discovering her flesh and blood. The audience accepts the artifice as all audiences accept the mode of fairy tale, as a serious meditation upon man's deepest desires for himself and his world. The kinds of artifice in the *Winter's Tale* are different from those of, say, *Romeo and Juliet* or *Richard III*, but the audience is still at home in the Shakespearean tone in the viewing two plays at once, and the plays all come round to the same purpose: to enable Shakespeare to speak to his audience with far greater scope and precision of attitude than he could in other more limited modes without them. It is the freedom of expression of a genius, this mastery of, this familiarity with, his audience, this continuous ability to move (and bring his audience with him) from Action to philosophic meditation upon it, from illusion to reality and back again.

### POSTSCRIPT ON PLAYING

I mentioned in my first chapter the immense difficulty in the presentation of dramatic works of subtle tonality such as Shakespeare's, not only in truly representing such tone, but in maintaining a continuity of *whatever* tone one finds in Shakespeare

when there are so many individual egos involved in a production (even a set designer or costumer or stage-effects man can falsify Shakespearean tone by overemphasizing the inner or the outer drama). I must confess that I am one of those who can hardly bear the trauma of live drama—where continuity of any sort is rarely to be found, and close fidelity to the playwright's attitudes even less. But it happens once in a while. I remember one evening in England at Oxford, I slid into the back of the Beaumont Theatre expecting to leave as I usually did between the acts or sooner, and fell into a *Twelfth Night* of a beauty and sensitivity that I had not thought possible on the stage. Frank Hauser was the director, and I kept coming back for anything that he directed. There was no grotesque overplaying, no ranting, no change of pitch or intensity or rhythm in delivery solely for their own sake or for an artificial pattern's sake. There were no gratuitous stampings up and down the stage, no meaningless gymnastics or gyrations, no placing of groups according to some exterior principle of design, but only the attempt to add by gesture the gentlest aid, or the least hindrance, to what the language carried to the audience.

The playing satisfied me so well not because I am congenitally against the overplaying styles I find so prevalent in Shakespearean production (though I guess I am), but because I feel that Shakespeare's characteristic tonality demands underplaying and understatement in gesture, speech, and spectacle.[3] If an audience is to maintain that posture of half-suspension between what I have called the inner and outer aspects of a play, if an actor is to speak now in-character, now out-of-character, if the mode is to modulate from naturalistic to fantastic, the diction from slang to heavy rhetoric, if the author is to extend his vision in the outer spoken meditations beyond that of the inner core drama, then the delivery of the language and gesture of both inner and outer drama must be subdued. An audience cannot accept the extended meditation if the action has been too heavily

emphasized. An actor cannot thunder like a complete melodramatic villain if the audience is to accept a moment later his philosophizing upon his villainy. The actor cannot praise himself quite as if he were truly praising himself when it is the choric praise of the world that Shakespeare has put into his mouth. The actor cannot whip himself up to fever pitch in delivering lines repudiating the law or lechery when the lines are not really relevant to his situation, are not really his, but rather Shakespeare's to his audience. Shakespeare's tone is one of intimacy with that audience, and overplaying is the death of intimacy.

# 10

# The Critical Act

Dryden:

1) . . . 'tis a secret of which few translators have sufficiently thought . . . the maintaining the Character of an Author, which distinguishes him from all others, and makes him appear that individual poet . . .

2) . . . in short, he [Lucretius] was so much an atheist, that he forgot sometimes to be a poet.

—Preface to *Sylvae*

I HAD A RULE for myself as a student which I kept as often as I could, though I cannot remember when it became a conscious rule rather than a habit. It was this: *Read literature sitting down, read about literature standing up.* I had been, ever since the

disease of Formulation infected me (as it infects all those who love literature and wonder why) very much afraid of the nurse Aesthetics, afraid that she would give me a shot and put me to sleep. It never seemed to me at all hard, as I stood in the dim library stacks and rifled through books about literature, to distinguish pages of scholarship, pages of metacritical aesthetics, and pages of disguised polemic from the pages for which I was seeking—pages of the moments of criticism. But it is not easy to express simply what I felt then intuitively. The critical act encompasses, first, the accurate response to the unique "tone" of a work and the continuity of that tone, and, secondly, the precise articulation of the response. The dominant purpose of this book has been to defend by way of example this narrow definition, to fight both against the encroachment upon the critic's land by scholarship, philosophy, or whatever, and, more seriously, against the tendency, as in Frye's *Anatomy*, to make the "critic" master of all lands (except perhaps that cherished parcel he really does own). I would like in this chapter to examine some of the implications of such a position toward criticism.

In the chapter on *Lycidas* I submitted that there existed (as a "limit" exists, "moving ever closer, never reaching") in the poem an objective or "normative" (objective enough) tone (a unique set of attitudes) which was accessible (as a limit) to all students of the poem, but which had not been articulated in criticism as I would have it. The position bristles with difficulties for the semantic purist, difficulties which can only be defended by the idea of limit.[1]

One might wish to deny 1) the existence of a normative tone in a poem, 2) the normative character of a careful reader's reactions to a poem, 3) the possibility of articulating the tone precisely in words other than the poem's, 4) the plausibility, statistically, that the articulation, if possible, would come so infrequently.

My answer to this last comes easiest: that articulation is very different from the apprehension of a complex tone or specific set of attitudes, and while innumerable readers can have felt the normative tone which an art work creates, the reader's attempt (and it is so rarely attempted) to articulate that tone can be mixed and muddled for all sorts of intruding reasons. It is simply not true that if one cannot articulate one does not understand; all experience of life denies such an equivalence of verbal facility with understanding, from the watching an athletic competition to the listening to a sonata. One can recognize that a Meyer Abrams is making fundamental distinctions with marvelous clarity in that fine first chapter of *The Mirror and The Lamp*, though the reader himself could not write so. To articulate with precision is the specialist's craft, and, to compound the difficulties, a specialist may precisely articulate a poor, inaccurate grasp of tone. Thus it is that some articulations can be better than others by virtue of precision of language *or* accuracy of response, and the best is so by virtue of being both more precise and *more* accurate than another. Precision of language is a function of learning, and here good scholarship and sound aesthetics (or the amalgam called literary theory) must help the erstwhile critic; accuracy of response is a function of the reader's success (after he has done all the scholarship to "learn the language") in forgetting all the literary categories and formulations he has created in his mind, and living vicariously in the author's created world for a while.

The question "Is that created world of the author the same for all readers?" is too severely posed. An answer must again be couched in terms of the concept of limit. We may say that the created world of an author elicits common understanding *enough* so that a system of attitudes and values is established which is coherent and accessible from its context.[2] In the created world of her fairy tale, Cinderella cannot be raped; in the New Testament world Saint Peter cannot dance a jig. The "law" is

unarguable at this crude level. If one accepts the demands of continuity here it seems to me he accepts in principle the existence of the normative tone in a work of art, the unique body of attitudes toward material or medium which can be understood better by one reader than another and articulated more precisely by one than another. To argue from the opposite direction, that it is impossible to maintain the idea of the absolute existence of an objective tone, of absolutely similar response of readers to tone, or absolute precision of articulation, is the aesthetician's private doorway to a prepared dungeon, where "self-wrung" and "self-strung" he will be a victim of the categorical languages of his trade.

Categorizing, the formulations of schema, genera, patterns, topologies, formulas, is the bane of the good critic, the staple of the good scientist or historian. It seems to me that Northrop Frye would have such categorizing the basic job of the critic. Categories are preferable to chaos, but nothing like having the unique object of art in clear focus before your eyes. Randall Jarrell's comment (only half facetious) is well to keep in mind:

> "*An Encyclopedia of Pseudo-Sciences* might define critical method as *the systematic (q.v.) application of foreign substances to literature; any series of devices by which critics may treat different works of art as much alike as possible.*"
>
> —*Poetry and the Age* (1955), p. 80.

Or even more pertinent, M. H. Abrams' remarks on archetypal criticism:

> The implicit canon here is that analogy justifies identification: if A is in some respects like B, then A is identifiable as B. This appears to be the standard formula of archetypal reasoning. If the stories of Hermione, Esther Summerson, Pamela, and Belinda are in some respects like the Prosperpine archetype, then these stories are all instances of the Prosperpine archetype.

> Even if we grant, in the first place, that these heroines are all Prosperpine figures who act out a ritual death, when we have made that discovery our task as practical critics has not even begun. For few works differ more radically from each other in constitution, characterization, qualitative feel, and emotional effect than do *The Winter's Tale, Bleak House, Pamela,* and *The Rape of the Lock,* and the job of a practical critic is to account for each work in its minute particularity.
>
> *University of Toronto Quarterly* (Jan. 1959, p. 194)
> —review of Frye's
> *Anatomy of Criticism*

The scientist is impatient with context, the critic as critic is interested only in context. As soon as a critic classifies two works of art together in a category, he ceases to be a critic and becomes for the moment a scholar. As soon as he stops asking "What is the tone, the unique body of attitudes of this art work?" and asks instead, "What should an art work do?" he becomes an aesthetician.

I have tried in the essays preceding this to stick to observations concerning tone and continuity which emerge from the context of specific works. Continuities (or discontinuities) of attitude develop, of course, from different impulses, intentions, or purposes in each author. But a given work exhibits sooner or later its own impulses, its own dominant concerns or attitudes, and then is either loyal or disloyal to them; the critic does not manufacture these continuities, he responds to them.[3]

I have tried, too, in these essays to avoid metacriticism, that is, comparing my own view of life and value with the author's (see the next chapter). I have tried to examine my reactions to a work carefully to determine whether that reaction is based on a work's dynamics, its consistencies or inconsistencies, or on my own biases. If on my own biases (or perhaps, better, my own attachments) the reaction is not critical (it might be something better), and I have tried to expunge such reactions from the

essays. The process at least promotes good habits; it may protect one from one's own prejudices and pretensions. One can, of course, warp the critical process of probing for tone and continuity on a work's own terms; one might formulate over-ingenuous continuities or discontinuities to satisfy one's own prejudices, but if one examines his responses as I advocate above, he will warp with a sense of uneasiness, and present his "case" with significant reservations and qualifications. He will not be the arrogant prophet come to save or damn with one or another intellectual or dialectical bludgeon.

The critical process I have been writing about should not be simply equated with the much-used term "practical criticism" (the word "practical" itself carries a pejorative sense). The term is used, as I see it, to encompass any sort of remark about a specific work of art, whether critically, sociologically or otherwise oriented, so long as the "critic" keeps referring to the work. As for the supposed complement to "practical criticism," that is, "theoretical criticism," I think it likewise a catch-all term, encompassing in it what should be distinguished as scholarship, criticism, and metacriticism.[4] Literary scholarship deals with "facts" (including the establishing of categories) about works of art, and metacriticism with the creation of standards of values for works of art. The term "aesthetics" (or, when applied to verbal constructs, "poetics") usually refers to a consideration of both intrinsic principles of "evaluation"—the domain of criticism—and the extrinsic principles of Valuation—metacriticism—of a work of art (with the emphasis on the latter). Criticism deals with, is based on, the objective (as a limit) tone, the unique context of attitudes, of specific works of art. It is my view that the principle of continuity of attitudes, of tone, is intrinsic to a work of art, hence can serve as the basis for a critical approach.

Now, given my views of criticism two implications are more or less obvious:

1) That criticism is not necessarily best which marshals evidence best, or presents its case best or most persuasively, or sets a work into its milieu best, or puts it best into focus in the history of ideas or the literary tradition.

2) That critic is not necessarily best whose aesthetics are most sound, whose metacritical positions are most impressive, whose scholarship is most precise.

The articulation of the true tone, the central attitudes of a work, is the fundamental critical act, the starting point from which the validity and precision of all other judgments and opinions concerning that work must come. If the tone is not well caught, no amount of scholarship, philosophy, or history will enable one to avoid critical error, that is, the false articulation of the attitudes of a piece, the finding of discontinuity of attitude where there is none, or the insensitivity to discontinuity where there is. It can happen that one has done all other things badly but has felt and articulated the true tone of a piece well. He is a critic for that moment.

I have tried in this book to be a critic according to my definition, to offer what I feel are insights into the central attitudes of a work or a body of work, and to sketch out enough of a defense to allow the sympathetic reader to understand with some precision what I meant. If I was to be honest to my belief that criticism is primarily concerned with such articulation of tone and continuity, I had no right in defending that belief to parade whatever scholarship preceded them, or to indulge in the literary categorizing or comparison which might lend them added credence or charm. I offer a much more detailed analysis and defense of my articulation of the tone of Hart Crane's *The Bridge* in chapter One of Part Two of this book, but there as elsewhere I am committed to staying within the poem, to articulating its central attitudes as the true starting point for valid criticism.

I remember that I was once originally excited about articulating my response to the tone of works like the panegyrics of Dryden and Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," but found then that W. K. Wimsatt and Stephen Whicher had articulated something like the same response already.[5] Their articulations of course go down in my Book of Critics. In this book, drawn up according to my definition of what criticism is, we will find much that has been called criticism omitted, much which is as yet snubbed as "merely" practical criticism, and many phrases embedded in essays otherwise undistinguished, there included. There will be some little known people represented (like, say, the man who wrote the truest essay on the tone of a Herbert poem for the *Saskatchewan Review*); many of the well-known writers about literature will be well-represented (like the man who wrote a big book on what criticism is, and gave many good examples), others, very worthy still, but working outside criticism, will be poorly represented (like the man who wrote a big book on what criticism is and gave bad, or few, examples).

It must be stressed that good criticism can exist independent of good metacriticism or good philosophy. I. A. Richards makes a strong case in the opening chapters of his *Principles of Literary Criticism* against all literary theory (ontology would be a better word) of the past, which he says always postulated the existence of beauty as an entity exterior to the perceiver. This may or may not be. However he goes on to assert that since all literary critics of the past embraced such a platonic fallacy, no literary criticism of the past really matters. My position is that the critic can make sound observations concerning the tone and continuity of a work (as Richards often does) independent of whether he believes beauty exists only in the mind or somewhere outside it. There are many writers since Richards who have demonstrated logical problems in Richard's own literary "theory" (notably

Murray Kreiger in his *The New Apologists For Poetry*). Ontological assumptions about art works come from integrations outside the specific work of art. It is the critic's job, when he is operating as a critic, to live within the artist's assumptions.

I remember the thrill of picking up R. P. Blackmur's *Language as Gesture* and finding what an exceptionally gifted critic could articulate about his responses to poets and poems. But I remember, too, long pages of (tedious) meditation as to whether the ideas of Eliot, Yeats, Hardy, or Pound could possibly make great poems. "*Stay with probing the poems, help me to respond rightly to what is there, I can make up my mind on that other stuff for myself*" is what I wanted to shout. "That other stuff" encompasses, to be sure, the reasons why we read, but unless the critic happens to present a system of values quite close to the reader's own metacritical positions, they are just wasting each other's time. To alter metacritical positions requires much more than an essay on literary or other philosophy.

Relatively free of metacriticism are those brilliant appreciations of poetry in Randall Jarrell's *Poetry and The Age*. Jarrell seems to me, his disarmingly casual manner aside, perhaps the best reader of and writer about poems and poets that we have had in America.[6] F. R. Leavis in England stays longer with and does more with a text than most. He has also strong metacritical views, especially on social questions, which seem to deny any seriousness or maturity to any sort of comic or satirical vision of man or of his world. Leavis (as do many of the *Scrutiny* circle) often confuses metacriticism with criticism and at times at least seems to consider both types of statement as resting on equally demonstrable bases. I prefer metacriticism to be frankly proffered as such, as Lionel Trilling does honestly and well in his social meditations. Most of what is called criticism is in reality metacriticism, or is the using of a text as material for philosophies or taxonomies or studies in other disciplines, historical, psychological, sociological, biographical, etc.[7] That can be all right.

The danger is however that these "criticisms" can connoisseur one out of one's critical sense, can dull the mind by seeking for sameness and blurring one's sense of uniqueness. This is why I keep my feet in a library.

Dryden knew what criticism was when he wrote the passages I've quoted to begin this chapter, the first about the "soul" of a literary work—its unique tone—the second about an author's violation of his tone. Aristotle formulated the law of continuity, which is as old as logical thinking, in passages like these from the *Poetics*:

1) . . . [Reversal and Recognition] . . . should arise from the internal structure of the plot, so that what follows should be the necessary or probable result of the preceding action." (X)

2) . . . for though the subject of the imitation . . . be inconsistent, still he must be consistently inconsistent. (XV)

3) . . . the poet should prefer probable impossibilities to improbable possibilities.[8] (XXIV)

Cleanth Brooks in his *Well-Wrought Urn* formulates much the same law twenty-five hundred years later when he says:

> A poem, then, to sum up, is to be judged, not by the truth or falsity as such, of the idea which it incorporates, but rather by its character as drama—by its coherence, sensitivity, depth, richness and tough-mindedness.

It is my point that what criticism is has always been felt and often stressed. Its definition (though not its practice) can be made easy and commonsensical: "criticism is the process of probing for and articulating tone and continuity."[9]

But the word has always encompassed more than this process in the range of its meanings (as do all important words). The meaning that I feel should be at the logical core of the word is

always getting submerged, pushed aside, blurred, as processes from other disciplines crowd it out, or as the critical process itself is mistakenly seen capable of swallowing all the others. Common sense will, I think always bring one back to the narrow core definition of criticism. For as an artist constantly fights for the integrity of his own medium, the true critic will fight for the narrow province, the special process, wherein he is an artist. Like the athlete who can do one thing well, the critic has, better than others, the particular ability to respond to and articulate the objective attitudes and the continuity of these in a unique work of art, and this is no mean ability. He has Keats' "negative capability" of traveling in another man's world and not fussing and making odious comparisons till he has lived there a while. The critic certainly will not be able to practice his narrow art if he is not a good scholar (as the athlete must train), and he will not move men or events (and all writers wish to) if he is not an impressive metacritic. As a critic, the writer about literature makes no ultimate judgments as to the value of a literary work, though he passes judgment constantly on its continuity of attitude. The critic aims at precision and clarity of statement and accuracy of response concerning tone and continuity, and these qualities are *a priori* valuable. I make no claim that the process which I call criticism can be methodized, that my essays will make good criticism any less of an art, but only perhaps that by lopping off excresences these essays may contribute a little towards encouraging the good young reader to attempt more often the critical act, or at least to realize when he is doing some other thing.

Johnson:

1) Piety is the only proper and adequate relief of decaying man. He that grows old without religious hopes, as he declines into imbecility, and feels pain and sorrows incessantly crowding upon him, falls into a gulf of bottomless misery, in which every reflection must plunge him deeper, and where he finds only new gradations of anguish and precipices of horror.

*Rambler* No. 69

2) The only end of writing is to enable the reader better to enjoy life or better to endure it.

The *Soame Jenyn's* review

# 11

# *Metacriticism*

METACRITICISM is the assessment of the view of life of a work or its author by a critic who uses as his basis of judgment his own or other views of life. Metacriticism is thus a comparison of created worlds. The assessment is made by means of a cherished set of values, such as Dr. Johnson's above. Criticism is concerned with the evaluation of the continuity of tone of an author's work by a critic who uses as his basis of judgment the unique body of attitudes created in the work. Scholarship is the process of search and discovery of information needed, of the tools necessary, to probe for tonality. The three processes, scholarship, criticism, and metacriticism, of course have no independent status in the mind of a reader, but they can be separated in one's logical analysis of a literary work. Scholarship can exist without the other two, and scholarly criticism can exist without metacriti-

cism. Metacriticism of a work can exist (is constantly offered) without much scholarship or criticism, but the metacritical statement then is a meaningful comment only on a philosophic (or other) position, not on the work in question.

I am confident that criticism can exist separately from metacritical positions. It was my experience with the scholarly and critical attempt I made in a book on Wallace Stevens that readers invariably considered me an unswerving Stevens disciple, and I had later to put my demurrers in the book's preface (and in chapter Five of this book). Likewise in teaching, in explicating and probing the tone of different authors' works day after day, one can baffle the student by being atheist one day, saint the next, by turns classic, romantic, rationalist, or mystic. But every so often in a class the role of scholar and critic does not suffice, and I caution the students that I, as do they, thrill to certain sentiments and gestures, hold certain values close, and love certain books as I love certain people. Such confession is salutary; it can help to put some perspective and proportion into what one is doing. I have said already that I have tried to keep metacritical observations out of the preceding essays, to stick to the act of criticism, but to do so was an exercise in demonstrating what I feel criticism is—the most graceful expressions of a literary man will always be the essays which flow back and forth from scholarship to criticism to metacriticism.

Metacritical reactions can cut deep across critical reactions, whether they are philosophically, politically, sociologically, or otherwise oriented. I can confess, to my students, for instance, that I would rather spend an evening with Sam Johnson than with John Milton, with John Keats rather than James Joyce. The reactions are emotional and non-critical, a question of sensing a similarity or lack of similarity in views of the human situation. We incline toward people who share our view, our perspective of the world, our context.

Some world views are better than others. The thundering

anger of a Sam Johnson with *Lycidas* is majestic and superb no matter how bad as criticism, because his Christian Existentialism is so very impressive. Likewise if a Winston Churchill calls a work "ignorant," or a Bernard Shaw calls a work "pompous," or a Christ or Saint Francis or a Gandhi calls a work "evil," we listen with respect. Such remarks from such people can kill forever a bad piece of writing, they can temporarily decimate a good piece. Such remarks from such people are precious and are preserved as part of a civilization's culture. They are precious not because of their degree of critical rightness, or because of their critical rightness at all, but because they come out of a vision of the world which is unified, coherent, and continuous. It has been the point of this book of criticism that continuity of attitude in a work is the fundamental critical demand of an audience or reader. It may be argued (and this is my modest contribution to metacritical aesthetics or ethics) that continuity in life is the fundamental desire of the human spirit, that continuity is a principle of value in experience as well as a first principle of evaluation in criticism. In the largest context, of course, we desire our lives to have continuity. Our will burns for coherence and significance—what Stevens calls the "rage for order"; any stability seems preferable to not knowing where we are. A Saint Francis or a Churchill or a Christ captures our imaginations, though we would perhaps not want to lead their lives, because there is a continuity, a unique consistency and focus to their lives. Theirs were ordered lives, selections from the possibilities of living, and they had the strength to maintain their postures. I take it too that the person of some moral sensibilities prefers the unhypocritical whore to the tease, the consistently irresponsible person to the capriciously so. Literature (or any of the arts, which articulate total views of the world), when it presents one reader's view, is wonderful, since it gives him the sense of community we all hunger for. Life is disorderly and painful; art is orderly and beautiful. The art of living (and life can never be a continuous art) is in the creation of an artificial (in the best

sense) order out of disorder. Consistency of tone as an approach to life can be seen as an ethical quality as well as an aesthetic demand. As we use the word continuity in criticism, we may use the word loyalty in ethics.

These are the aphorisms or the axioms upon which a theory of value in ethics might be built. But, as any set of axioms can be developed to generate a mathematical system, so, I am well aware, can my metacritical axioms be based on a personal reading of experience, on a personal context. The principle of continuity may be embedded in the bedrock of the universe and in human instinct, or it may not—I do not know. But I know wherefrom the idea of the principle came. It was whispered over my shoulder by a great mathematician and friend and firmly embedded itself in that "foul rag and bone shop of the heart" from which all things human generate. There is such rancor in the area of culture we call "criticism" often because one man is really attacking the metacritical postures of another, and that is a stab to the heart, a violation of one man's private love, a threat to the enduring thrill of one man's deepest personal truth. If each critic's private metacritical garden were unlocked, lo, what strange wonders one might find inside. But such an opening of gates would be helpful to criticism itself. It would make obvious, at least, how very much of what calls itself criticism is in fact metacriticism, or a comparing of the critic's garden with an author's.

Metacritical axioms springing from the emotions and experience lead to principles of value for life and for works of art. The moral life was obviously more important than art for Samuel Johnson, so that the adequacy of moral vision in a work (by Johnson's standards) often constituted its whole value for him, and to be critically unfair or short with a work of inadequate moral vision seemed to him a matter of little importance.

I have great sympathy with a metacriticism that puts greater value on good people than on good constructs of the imagination, as Sam Johnson's does. Such is a metacriticism that finds

its focus in ethics. There are, of course, others that find their focus (and hence their standards of value for the works of art) in politics, psychology, social action, biography, history, the various branches of philosophy, in short, in any and all the areas of interest for the human mind. (I try in chapter Thirteen of Part II of this book to demonstrate the various metacritical bases of the full range of the literature on Crane's *The Bridge*). The rub is that such metacritical postures are often disguised by the critic who sees or pretends to see no other attitude towards or valuation of a work than his own. Unless one has read a great deal of, say (to stick to men of great ability), C. S. Lewis, Yvor Winters, or F. R. Leavis, one could certainly use a sketch of metacritical attitudes of the critic when he reads Lewis on Love in his first chapter of the *Allegory of Love* or on the "Fortunate Fall" in his *Preface to Paradise Lost*, Winters on Wallace Stevens as a "hedonist," and Robert Frost as a "spiritual drifter," Leavis on Othello as a megalomaniac, and Swift as an apostle of negation.

Standards of value for literary works of art from areas of interest outside the area of poetics are clearly metacritical. There are also the metacritical postures, standards of value for works of art, from men whose interest *is* the art work itself, or, at least, literature in general. We are speaking now of that branch of aesthetics which William Wimsatt, in *The Verbal Icon* (1954, p. 69), calls "metaphysical poetics." General or theoretic questions like "What does or should an art work do?" or, "How does the art work do what it could or should?" or, "What relation does the art work have to reality, or the reader's psychology, to his morals, or his life?" are questions that can be answered ultimately for oneself only in terms of metaphysics or religion. The literature on such questions is vital and enormous; it is the manifest intent of this chapter only to stress that we gain nothing by calling the meditations on such overwhelming ontological questions criticism.[1]

A metaphysical poetics may focus its sense of value on the

success of a work's dramatizing either the 1) complexity of one's attitude towards the outer phenomenological reality or the inner psychological realities, or 2) the ordered unity of attitudes towards either of these. The dominant metacritical posture of our century is that value in an art work is related to the complexity and the heterogeneity of the attitudes which are assimilated and given form (through the dramatizing of paradoxical, ambiguous, and ironical situations). Cleanth Brooks is persuasive toward this point of view in *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947):

> In *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* I suggested that Richards' distinction between "poetry of exclusion" and "poetry of inclusion" might be developed into a kind of scale for determining the value of poetry. Low in the scale one would find a rather simple poetry in which the associations of the various elements that go to make up the poem are similar in tone and therefore can be unified under one rather simple attitude—poems of simple affection, positive, "external" satires, etc. Higher in the scale, one would find poems in which the variety and clash among the elements to be comprehended under a total attitude are sharper. In tragedy where the clash is at its sharpest—where the tension between attraction and repulsion is the most powerful—one would probably find the highest point in the scale. So much for the positive side; but there is a negative side too, where one would place those poems which failed to secure unity at all—or achieved only a specious reconciliation of attitudes—the sentimental poem. (pp. 256-7)

I. A. Richards, to whom Brooks refers, articulates beautifully the psychological response of the reader to the sense of "order" or "unity" that an art work seems to produce:

> Everybody knows the feeling of freedom, of relief, of increased competence and sanity, that follows any reading in which more than usual order and coherence has been given to our responses. We seem to feel that our command of life, our insight into it and our discrimination of its possibilities, is enhanced, even for

> situations having little or nothing to do with the subject of the reading . . . And conversely everybody knows the diminution of energy, the bafflement, the sense of helplessness, which an ill-written, crude or muddled book, or a badly acted play, will produce, unless the critical task of diagnosis is able to restore equanimity and composure.
>
> *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) pp. 235-6

The question is, however, if the psychology of the reader is more likely to feel command over life or his own responses by the art work's encompassing more of it, that is, more attitudes poised in a "tense reconciliation" or by creating the illusion of complete command over a limited set of attitudes. It may be argued, as it was argued earlier concerning Christ and Churchill, that human desire is more satisfied by a limited ordered set of attitudes or responses (one author's created world) than by the attempt to hold opposed attitudes in a paradoxically—ordered suspension. We may hunger more, that is, for order than truth, for a sense of unity than complexity, for illusion rather than contrarity, more for the unique imaginative world of an individual spirit than for existential poise in the face of an irresolvable dualism.[2] And then too there is always the religious question as to whether "illusion" might not in fact, be "vision." But I am conscious that I am slipping into metacritical rhetoric concerning problems essentially metaphysical. These considerations do not help nor hinder good criticism. Whatever cavils I might have concerning metacritical aesthetic position with those who talk in terms of complexity, it seems to me that much of the century's best criticism comes from that quarter, from Eliot, Empson, Blackmur, Brooks, and others.

So much of what is called "criticism" is metacriticism, and most of the bitter "critical" wrangles are the clash of metacritical positions set on automatic pilot. Good metacriticism does not need to parade as criticism, and men who damn and praise from metacritical bases and insist that it is criticism are guilty

finally of nothing less common than a flaw of character. It is understandable and human. It is very hard for an intelligent man to feel that any intelligent man can respond emotionally to the world in a different way than he does. I find it hard to accept (though it is demonstrated everywhere I turn) that intelligent men can build a metacriticism around any other abstractions than those of love and pity, of the sanctity of obligations, of work and loyalty, of gentleness and respect. Those are the "limits" towards which we all should move. But "we" don't, though some do, one better than another.

I must confess that I have, I realize, used "we" and the "audience" everywhere in this book, often without qualification. Often it was justified because it is my feeling that "we" and the "audience" *do* exist on common ground when we are within the created world of the art work, the artist's continuum. We live in that world as scholars, critics, and perhaps friends of the author. Outside of that world, "we" disperse, and there is no longer an "audience," but a multitude of metacritics of more or less mind and character. So that when I say that life is more important than art, metacriticism than criticism, I am not making a statement for "we" but for "I" and maybe for "you." Therefore, I would be understood rightly when I say that compassion and sympathy are what we all want, and that without these criticism or scholarship is a sterile joke. That good art can bring people together momentarily is wonderful; criticism, in helping the reader to respond accurately to an art work's tonality, allows him to share in that blessed continuity.

# PART II

## *Hart Crane's* The Bridge

## *and Its Critics*

# 12

# The Bridge

In retrospect (and given my approach to criticism above) it seems to me that I came to Hart Crane's *Bridge* in the right critical condition. I had read a good deal of modern poetry with a good deal of care and I had read practically nothing about Crane or his poetry. I remember my reactions toward the poem on that first reading: great admiration generally, a feeling that the poem had a subtle precision and coherence of tone, and that the tone could be articulated accurately once a second reading cleared up local difficulties. Luckily, I was forced a year later to the second reading in order to teach the poem, with no time for any tempting turns toward the literature on Crane or the poem. And now after finally going through all that secondary reading (and the welter of metacriticism it includes) and then many times again through the unique context of the poem, it seems to me that I might

profitably, for the purposes of this book, 1) articulate my response to the tone and continuity of tone of *The Bridge*, defend that articulation by a detailed appeal to the language and situation of each of its parts, and then 2) examine the sorts of response the poem has elicited from others. I don't think I need apologize for my perhaps exhausting consideration of the poem's central attitudes or of other writers' consideration of them, for, as I will try to demonstrate in chapter thirteen, when these attitudes are not well caught, corollary critical errors cannot help following. If the critical act is to have independent status from the investigations of the historian or biographer, the psychologist or philosopher, if the work of art is to have independent status from the sociological, historical, or philosophic tract, or from the folk tale or dream, both the unique work of art and the literature on it must be examined with all the accuracy of response and precision of articulation the critic can muster.

*The Bridge* is a good case in point for my approach because it has until recently been harshly treated. A difficult poem in a difficult style by an author whose personal weaknesses and traumas had been widely publicized, and who wrote in a decade fascinating to intellectual and social historians, Hart Crane's poem has suffered more than most by extrinsic metacritical or non-critical approaches. The poem's central attitudes, closely studied and precisely articulated, have a continuity beyond all extrinsic expectations, and it is only intrinsic critical study that is objective enough to respond to that continuity.

My basic position is that *The Bridge* is a poem which dramatizes a dualistic experience of life: that is, the poem says that life is both a blessing and a nightmare and that it is so eternally (as far as one can see) in the cyclic pattern called the Process (figured in the River). The pattern without is matched by the pattern within. In the mortal human consciousness, limited and fragile, the dualism also exists eternally in the swinging between the poles of despair and desire: to despair is to be without a mythology

of self, society, and surroundings, to desire is to love a given or a created mythology. One wants belief in the mythology, but the despairing eye sees all mythologies as part of the process. Societies cannot sustain their mythologies forever. And the desperate poet in a desperate time is willing to settle personally for the aesthetic (imaginative) moment or moments which give him a sense of integration within a mythology truly believed in only with respect to its effects.

This set of emotional attitudes towards life (the poem's "tone") I have seen elsewhere in modern poetry; it is in fact to my mind a dominant posture toward experience in our time among writers. It is a natural response to life by a complex person in a complex world, and Hart Crane, in his dramatization of that complex response, demonstrates what he has not been much credited with, a fine stability and continuity in attitude to match his fine sense for words.

Episode is set against episode in *The Bridge*, image against image, more especially word against word, so that all affirmation of myth is countered, tempered, by the contrary negations of reality. This counterpointing makes for a structure some have called confused, for a diction some have called loose or baroque. My obsessive point is going to be that if the intent of the language is understood and the vision of experience dictating the structure seized, the poem is most precise and clear, and exhilarating in its communication of a reading of life which is not compromised—is rather conveyed—by its diction and structure. I feel that the logic of the poem's lines, paragraphs, and sections is not hard to grasp once one sees the thorough-goingness of the poem's intent to express a dualistic rather than an "idealistic," or "affirmative," or "platonic," or "mystic," or "epic," or, for that matter, wholly "tragic" vision. One can find lines in the poem that can support any sort of vision but it is my point that the poem's own inner dynamics impel a dualistic conception of experience wherein "affirmation" is a question of man's imagination endlessly creat-

ing myths of order to fight against chaotic reality. *The Bridge* is a "failure" (loose word) in the eyes of many critics because it does not move according to the dynamics of a body of attitudes that they for various reasons feel the poem embraces. The argument becomes one of objective tone: what are the attitudes of the poem, and what continuity do they have? It is therefore time to go into the poem and to stay there for a long time.

"Proem"

> How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest
> The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,
> Shedding white rings of tumult, building high
> Over the chained bay waters Liberty—
> Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes
> As apparitional as sails that cross
> Some page of figures to be filed away;
> —Till elevators drop us from our day . . .

The poem begins with a floating question (How many dawns?) which seems to go unanswered as the lines trail off. But the question is rhetorical, the emotional answer Crane expects is obvious in the handling: the bird will probably always waken chill, always fly free yet chained (there is a pun on "Liberty," the statue in the bay and the bird's sort of liberty), its flight is "tumult" yet it is "building," the curve of the bird's arc is "inviolate" and yet "apparitional." It is so to "our eyes," we being the modern desk-chained unfree dreamers. The bird, of course, is really there flying out on the bay; the illusion of our inviolate freedom (that which the bird's flight represents) is the apparition. The elevator dropping is a psychological representation of the quick fall of our spirits as we move from delight in the illusions we build about an ideal (Liberty) through looking at the bird, to the despair we feel when we sense the illusion as illusion.

I hope to demonstrate that the building of delightful, necessary illusion is the core definition of myth-making with which Hart Crane works. But what is clear in a close look at the first two stanzas of the poem is the sense of the ever-recurring cycle of dualistic experience. The next two stanzas present us with two "thoughts" or images, one of cinemas, one of the bridge, which we understand as prompted by the psychological tension created by the images of the bird flying against the elevator dropping. Though the one image is frightening, the other uplifting, the syntax "I think of cinemas . . . and Thee . . ." joins the emotional implications of both together as experiences of equal strength. Coming after the first two stanzas as they do, they function as a second oblique answering to the same oblique question that begins the poem.

> I think of cinemas, panoramic sleights
> With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene
> Never disclosed, but hastened to again,
> Foretold to other eyes on the same screen;
>
> And Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced
> As though the sun took step of thee, yet left
> Some motion ever unspent in thy stride,—
> Implicitly thy freedom staying thee!

What the multitude hungers for is never disclosed on the screen though they (we) never stop watching. The bridge we can say at this early stage of the poem represents an accomplished creation which gives the poet psychological solace the cinemas do not. Part of the exultation seems to come from the sense of the bridge not being limited and yet being stable, its being fixed despite its freedom. The bridge represents a psychological (spiritual, mystical, some would say now) state desired, the cinema watchers a state feared.

At this place in the poem the reader's mind bristles with possibilities of interpretation. Why not, it immediately suggests itself, the movie watchers as Plato's cave dwellers, the bridge Crane's symbol for the Platonic Good, or Sun, or Absolute, the poem as a drama of the Bad—the phenomenological reality—versus the Good—the striving for knowledge of the Higher Reality, the Absolute beyond? Strongly committed Platonists, idealists, romantics of all sorts, and also all those strongly committed against such systems of thought can (and do) operate with Crane's poem against such a framework of intention and the frameworks of their own prepared dialectics. One can show how *The Bridge* is, say, a failure, because, 1) the system of thought is *a priori* poor, 2) Crane did not understand the system of thought, 3) his life was so miserable he could only half believe in the system of thought, his despair marring his exultation, 4) he lost faith in the system of thought midway in the composition of the poem, marring the exultation. Or the poem can be judged a success by arguing something like the opposite of all these objections (see chapter thirteen below for all of these formulations).

Any one of these arguments for or against the poem might be the true one—all depends on the context of the poem. None of them is true I think, though many of them are very well argued, because the poem is, I hope to demonstrate, not drawing a dichotomy between a lower and a higher reality, but simply dramatizing two polar states of consciousness of the sensitive poet facing modern reality, the sense of integration within a myth and the sense of disorientation without. The poem dramatizes the eternal rolling wave of alternation between these two states; this dramatization is the core of the poem. The Platonic and Christian motifs and allusions to Greek, American, and other mythologies are used as material in the dramatization. The poet building bridges of myth over the waters would of course like to be gathered up into eternal life, but to make the religious hunger (or a hunger for

death for that matter) the core attitude of the poem is to confuse what is at the center with what is at the circumference.

> Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft
> A bedlamite speeds to thy parapets,
> Tilting there momently, shrill shirt ballooning,
> A jest falls from the speechless caravan.
>
> Down Wall, from girder into street noon leaks,
> A rip-tooth of the sky's acetylene;
> All afternoon the cloud-flown derricks turn . . .
> Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still.

These lines, the first seven of them, present a harsh picture of disoriented life in the suicide and the jesting crowd. Sunlight "leaks," and is a "rip-tooth," the sky is "acetylene"—that anyway is how nature looks to the city dweller. Paradoxically the derricks are more romantically pictured as "cloud-flown." To make nature mechanical, machines spiritual, is to struggle both to avoid romanticism *and* materialism, to be enough of a skeptic to reduce spiritual delight to the mind's imaginings, to be enough of a romantic to accept the imagination's constructs as blessed. These are the central attitudes which impel Crane's poem.

The last line of the stanzas, after the disoriented life described in the first seven lines, comments ambiguously concerning the bridge that "Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still." The bridge represents the psychological state desired, the Atlantic that which must be spanned psychologically. The real bridge and the mythological bridge stand in a paradoxical relationship. There is a pun on "still" which can dramatize this paradox: "still" as "quiet," which is the opposite of modern city life (and of course not really true of the North Atlantic), and "still" as "always," opposed to the mortality of man and his myths, both senses in opposition to the turning of the derrick and the moving of the waters (which literally of course will some day destroy the

bridge). The next three stanzas play variations on the bridge as myth and man's relation to his myths.

> And obscure as that heaven of the Jews
> Thy guerdon . . . Accolade thou dost bestow
> Of anonymity time cannot raise:
> Vibrant reprieve and pardon thou dost show.
>
> O harp and altar, of the fury fused,
> (How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)
> Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,
> Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry,—
>
> Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift
> Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
> Beading thy path—condense eternity:
> And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.

These lines need not be interpreted as a (frantic) invocation to a transcendent God or Absolute as so much of the Crane literature would have it, but as a carefully wrought and poised statement of the psychological efficacy of parables of ourselves and our destiny (the "heaven of the Jews") have on us. Myths fuse the fury for our consciousness, fulfill psychologically the prophet, the pariah, the lover, give us all reprieve and pardon momently from the fury, and lift the night from our spirit. As the lights on the bridge bead the darkness of night, so does myth, in a cycle with day's harsh reality, return over and over to "condense," "fuse," "repair" our chaotic and fractured lives. Myth-making is bridgemaking, is, like song or sacrifice (harp and altar), an ordering, and an ordering is like a miracle. The line "How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!" is not a question but an ambiguous statement. Its tone is that of amazement that toil *did* make the music. Now, the attitude of awe or disbelief, the sense that the creation must be divinely inspired, is there too, perhaps. And no question that the whole passage and some others in the poem can be read with the bridge as link to higher

reality outside of time. But to read that way is, I hope to demonstrate, to force many passages into a dialectic scheme or to call them confused—in general, to focus on peripheral rather than central impulses of the poem.

How can equating the symbol of the bridge with, say, God, explain the curious diction of lines like " . . . Accolade thou dost bestow/Of anonymity time cannot raise"? The bridge bestows an "accolade of anonymity," that is, myth gives praise to the multitude (as the bridge is a testimony to the work of many hands). The anonymous man in the multitude gets no accolades or guerdon except in myth; he cannot praise his life except as it is seen through myth. What Time does not allow, myth can. There is a pun, I think on "raise." Time cannot raise man so high as myth does; neither can Time "raze" the imaginative constructs of man like the bridge. The sense of what the bridge bestows on man being much and not-so-much is hardly apt if to speak of God's grace or of mystic vision. Crane's condition is hardly that of the religious mystic, though he uses (for the purposes usually of wistful irony) language from such literature.

> Under thy shadow by the piers I waited;
> Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.
> The City's fiery parcels all undone,
> Already snow submerges an iron year . . .
>
> O Sleepless as the river under thee,
> Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,
> Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
> And of the curveship lend a myth to God.

The desired shadow is clear only in darkness when physical shadows have disappeared. It is a spiritual shadow, giving relief from reality's (day's) bright glare. The bridge's light is different from the day's as the "shadow" is different from reality's night. The poet's chronic state is that of chill, night, winter, etc.—snow submerging an iron year. The shadow of the bridge descends

on him only sometimes, in the soul's "dark" moments to "lend a myth." The constructive bridging, the "lifting" of the darkness by darkness, by "obscure" myth, is an endless process, as is the flow of the destructive river of time beneath ("O Sleepless as the river under thee"). River and bridge are in eternal and tragic dualistic opposition.

Now one certainly thinks here of, say, the "Dark Way of the Soul" of St. John of the Cross, and, with the title "Ave Maria" of the following section, it might be tempting to fasten the poem onto the cloth of catholic mysticism, or some other sort of transcendentalism. We have here at the end of this plodding analysis of the "Proem" kept the door open for Supernaturalism and Vision while arguing for Dualism. I hope however now to proceed through the rest of the poem and, without warping sections to my argument, to persuade the reader to the dualistic view—so that by the time he comes to lines like the following (from "Atlantis," the last section of the poem) where the "traveler"

> Searches the timeless laugh of mythic spears.
>
> Like hails, farewells—up planet-sequined heights
> Some trillion whispering hammers glimmer Tyre:
> Serenely, sharply up the long anvil cry
> Of inchling aeons silence rivets Troy.
> And you, aloft there—Jason! hesting Shout!
> Still wrapping harness to the swarming air!
> Silvery the rushing wake, surpassing call,
> Beams yelling Æolus! splintered in the straits!

—I want the reader to see that "the timeless laugh of mythic spears" refers to the necessary sufficiency of myth, like the Iliad myth, to delight the spirit of man which eternally hungers for myth. Myth-making is like sequining planets—part lie and absurd, but it is too like the instinct of self-preservation in us all: "trillion whispering hammers glimmer Tyre." We hail the

myth we thus fashion as we bid others, like that of Troy—farewell. Cyclically ("cycloramically" is Crane's apt word) mankind (Jason the traveler) "harnesses the air," makes something of nothing, eventually to be "splintered in the straits." This is not a vision of life that is an answer to anything; it is a dramatization of a felt dualism that is made bearable by the shared inventions of the imagination. It is, I think, the posture of Crane, Stevens, Yeats, Pound, and other artists of our time.[1] Whatever the reader thinks metacritically of the posture, the hope of this essay is that he will come to agree that Crane's apparently "confused" diction is in fact a vehicle of precision for the continuous dramatization of that posture. If that happens, the purposes of criticism, as this book has defined criticism, will have been achieved.

## I. "Ave Maria"

Hart Crane's Columbus is one Jason in the long line. The historical Columbus serves here in one episode and is one aspect of the poet's personal meditation concerning myth. This great monologue uses the historical Columbus, adopts in part his world-view, his beliefs. And yet the Columbus that emerges from the monologue embraces the conscious philosophic dualism which is Crane's. The Columbus of the poem expresses a tortured faith which in its finest moments can bridge the dualism; Crane, without that faith, places Columbus' faith in the pattern of *The Bridge* which speaks about the periodicity of faith and doubt, desire and despair. The poem opens:

> Be with me, Luis de San Angel, now—
> Witness before the tides can wrest away
> The word I bring,

as if it will be inevitable that the word he brings be wrested away. And if it all be wrested away—"Yet lost, all, let this keel one instant yield!" That is, the moment's exaltation makes the loss bearable. The nature of the moment is the question, and

the suggestions of the diction are all we have by way of answer. Let us look at that diction. The poem is addressed to the Virgin, yet Crane's Columbus has but one small prayer to her and it is very minimal in its tone:

> (O Madre Maria, still
> One ship of these thou grantest safe returning;
> Assure us through thy mantle's ageless blue!)

Thanks is given that the one ship at least has been spared and courage is asked for as that ship proceeds under the blue sky. The pun on "through thy mantle's ageless blue" is quite conscious, referring to the Catholic concept of Mary's power of intercession but also to the blank blue of the heavens under which man lives. Crane wants this ambivalence of attitude, this poise between Columbus' faith and the poet's doubt. A similar effect occurs later in the monologue—

> —round thy brows unhooded now
> —the kindled crown!

which represents both the ecstatic moment of Columbus' Beatific Vision and the emergence simply of the constellation from under cloud cover. Crane wishes to leave open both the possibility that Columbus and other voyagers have Beatific Visions and the alternate possibility that the imagination in all times sees gods only by wanting badly enough.

> —still one shore beyond desire!
> The sea's green crying towers a-sway, Beyond
> And kingdoms
> naked in the
> trembling heart—

One never reaches one's trembling heart's desire. One wishes to go beyond the sea's reality, to tumble the kingdoms of the sea, sky and earth, and reach the heart's need of heaven. But the inscrutable God (as Crane's Columbus sees Him), the cruel inquisi-

tor (who "sleepest on Thyself") will not "utter to loneliness" (to the voyager) that the "sail is true." Columbus has but faith, the "needle" which yields by "inference and discard" to guide him. Faith is the "disposition that thy night relates/From Moon to Saturn in one sapphire wheel," and that disposition to see the universe so ordered is the "toil" that Columbus sees as

> mustering
> In holy rings all sails charged to the far
> Hushed gleaming fields and pendant seething wheat
> Of knowledge,—

That is, all sailors, voyagers into the unknown, are sailing in hopes of, with the disposition to believe in, an ordered heaven. (The "hushed gleaming" wheat field of "knowledge" recurs throughout the poem as a figuration of mythic order).

The last half of "Ave Maria" is not that awed psalm to God in a curious decorative diction that it might at first seem, but a carefully poised and minimal statement of faith's operations in a harsh world.

> And later hurricanes may claim more pawn . . .
> For here between two worlds, another, harsh,
>
> This third, of water, tests the word; lo, here
> Bewilderment and mutiny heap whelming
> Laughter, and shadow cuts sleep from the heart
> Almost as though the Moor's flung scimitar
> Found more than flesh to fathom in its fall.
> Yet under tempest-lash and surfeitings
> Some inmost sob, half-heard, dissuades the abyss,
> Merges the wind in measure to the waves,
>
> Series on series, infinite,—till eyes
> Starved wide on blackened tides, accrete—enclose
> This turning rondure whole, this crescent ring
> Sun-cusped and zoned with modulated fire
> Like pearls that whisper through the Doge's hands

Water, the destructive ("skeptic") element overwhelms belief. It is the "enemy," as the Moor, which can destroy the spirit of man along with the flesh. The spirit's enemy is disorder, chaos, the abyss, and the desire for order within us (figured as a sob wrenched out of suffering) is that which merges wind and wave eternally. The image is analogous to Jason's harnessing the air mentioned earlier. Or, in other figurations, the starved spirit "wide on blackened tides" "accretes," "encloses" the turning world of Flux, "modulates" fire, creates "pearls." Words like "accrete," "enclose," "modulate" and "dissuades" are purposely abstract and strange in context to force the reader to see that the mind is "building" a myth out of its own resources rather than finding one naturally there. The historical Columbus would not need to search for such ambiguous language; the need is Crane's. Criticism has tried to handle the curious lines following the passage above as if they referred simply to Columbus' cautioning the Doge against exploitation of the new-found colonies. The lines in fact point up the awareness and the inevitableness (just as the first lines of the section do) of the operation of the cyclical process, of the permanence only of the dualistic condition:

> —Rush down the plenitude, and you shall see
> Isaiah counting famine on this lee!

Likewise with the lines that are so often quoted to demonstrate Crane as a mystic visionary: Columbus gazing at the "sapphire wheel" of the heavens and saying of it

> The orbic wake of thy once whirling feet,
> Elohim, still I hear thy sounding heel!

One should sense the implication in "wake" as "that only which is left," in "once" that Elohims feet no longer whirl, in the hearing still of sounding heel as God having just about left the scene. The historical Columbus' beliefs are maintained in these

lines but Crane's doubts are also. "Ave Maria" does not in sum present itself as a poem of a mystic integration achieved, but of the desire for integration of dualistic experience. And the desire is the only absolute Crane knows.

## II. "Powhatan's Daughter"

The Five Parts that make up Section II of *The Bridge* are linked by a flowing prose commentary set in brackets. Considering the commentary as one paragraph is most helpful in leading the reader better into the sequence, its unity of purpose and tone.

> [400 years and more . . . or is it from the soundless shore of sleep that time . . . recalls you to your love, there in a waking dream to merge your seed . . .—with whom? . . . Who is the woman with us in the dawn? . . . whose is the flesh our feet have moved upon? . . . Streets spread past store and factory—sped by sunlight and her smile . . . Like Memory, she is time's truant, shall take you by the hand . . . and past the din and slogans of the year—to those whose addresses are never near . . . but who have touched her, knowing her without name . . . nor the myths of her fathers . . . Then you shall see her truly—your blood remembering its first invasion of her secrecy, its first encounters with her kin, her chieftain lover . . . his shade that haunts the lakes and hills . . . and read her in a mother's farewell gaze.]

The "you" familiarly addressed is the reader. The poet hopes that the reader will understand the four hundred year jump in time the poem is to take now, from Columbus to Twentieth-Century New York City. Such a jump is nothing, Crane intimates, since the whole phantasmagoria takes place in the imagination. In that middle region between reality and dream (figured in the moment of waking at dawn) one is drawn to "merge" with a "woman." There is no woman with the poet in the bed. The women in the poem ("she," "Pocahontas," "Priscilla," "Eve,"

"Mary," etc.) figure and refigure the poet's desire ("love") for a mythology of himself and his world. "Her . . . chieftain lover" whose "shade haunts the lakes and hills" is the poet—the sensitive man who integrates himself to life through the blessed illusions of myth, investing hill and lake with presences. "She"—figuring the desire for meaning and order in reality—can be read in a "mother's" farewell gaze—any mother's—and in the chieftain lover's eyes.

Time (the River, the Serpent) is the enemy, and only through the mythologizing of Memory (the imagination reworking the past) can Time be overcome for a time. Van Winkle, the Tramps, the Ozark Gods, the Indians, and the Indiana mother are all "psychological ponies" (Crane's term) in parables of the consciousness of the poetic spirit caught up in myth. I put all of this down so flatly by way of introduction because it is so very common for analysis of this section of *The Bridge* to fly off from a sense of revelation concerning this or that line or image. Such flights have, as I see it, either transported Crane to lands he never lived in or make him an inspired naif, his poem a mixture of pearls and mud.

### "The Harbor Dawn"

As the poet wakes into reality from sleep, "fog" (a "mistletoe of dreams") covers all harsh sounds and sights in soft illusion

> Gongs in white surplices, beshrouded wails,
> Far strum of fog horns . . . signals dispersed in veils.
>
> . . . Soft sleeves of sound
> Attend the darkling harbor, the pillowed bay;
> Somewhere out there in blankness steam
>
> Spills into steam, and wanders, washed away
> —Flurried by keen fifings, eddied
> Among distant chiming buoys—adrift.

This last word is at the tonal center. This in imagination's loose half-integration of reality's harshness, reality which slowly, as the poet wakens, "Comes echoing alley-upward through the dim snow." The greater, more difficult integration will have to come in the complete facing of the day, the awake handling of "memory," the more conscious assimilation of "machinery" into myth to come. Difficult because in part absurd. The pun on "sirens" below carries within it this sense of absurdity.

> And you beside me, blessed now while sirens
> Sing to us, stealthily weave us into day—

"Day," time, space, as always the enemy; "she," the blessed one, who inspires song against the sirens, whose "smile" carries us past the din and slogans of the year, is the impulse towards order within. The sirens are at once Odysseus' tormenters (representing the seductions of din and slogans) and also they are simple mechanical sirens, whose sound is hardly sweet. The irony of the lines work for comedy as well as lyricism. Such ironic poise is typical of Crane.

### "Van Winkle"

As THE POET WALKS in the day he begins also an imaginative walk into the past—his childhood and the American past. There are childhood memories that are sweet ("a rhyme out of a box") like chasing garter snakes and launching model airplanes, and others that are sad (splitting the smell of flowers) like a whipping from Father and a single lost chance for communication with Mother. Like Van Winkle in old age and a new time, the adult poet lives now in a far greyer world (only the imagination tinges life with "gold"): the snake and the plane represent evils now, not games (see "The River," "The Dance" and "Cape Hatteras"), and the parents' indifference has left scars of loneliness. Rip, shorn of dignity, a sweeper in our time, like the poet bereft

of mythology of self and place, is "not here or there," floating merely, as the hobos float in the lines to follow.

"The River"

> So the 20th Century—so
> whizzed the Limited—roared by and left
> three men, still hungry on the tracks, ploddingly
> watching the tail lights wizen and converge, slip-
> ping gimleted and neatly out of sight.

And out of mind, as all things feed the River. The Twentieth-Century is full of dreams, the "ticking dreams" of men who forge our age and those of the hobos who sense "the river's minute by the far brook's year." Dreams, ages, myths, come and go.

> Papooses crying on the wind's long mane
> Screamed redskin dynasties that fled the brain,
> —Dead echoes! But I knew her body there,
> Time like a serpent down her shoulder, dark,
> And space, an eaglet's wing, laid on her hair.

This is not a return to some deep racial heritage or memory in our blood; it is an imaginative and intellectual attempt to make oneself at home in space. One's love of a hill is greater if Van Winkle supposedly slept there, the hurtling train's steam as the mane of the Indian's horse relates us both to the train (modern America) and the Indian (ancient America). Time and Space are not man's pets nor the soil man's lover unless man will see them so. There are no gods in the Ozarks save those that were in the minds of the long-gone believers and those that are present to the poet who understands the power of myths.

> Under the Ozarks, domed by Iron Mountain
> The old gods of the rain lie wrapped in pools
> Where eyeless fish curvet a sunken fountain

> And re-descend with corn from querulous crows.
> Such pilferings make up their timeless eatage,
> Propitiate them for their timber torn
> By iron, iron—always the iron dealt cleavage!
> They doze now, below axe and powder horn.

These are central lines. These same hills have seen the Indian worshippers, the pioneers, and the soldiers of the Civil War, once all wrapped in myths and now in death. Iron figures Time's destruction of myths, iron out of gold. Process, Flux, is figured in the stanzas to follow, first as a "dance of wheel on wheel" (the train) and then as the river ("alluvial march of days"). All men and all myth feed the river, all men are "pioneers in time's despite." We challenge the inexorable river with all the weapons we have—our hopes and beliefs in ourselves and in our myths. The river however finally spends *all* dreams (as De Soto's of El Dorado), the objects of all desires (. . . "Ahead/No embrace opens but the stinging sea"), all religious hunger

> —The Passion spreads in wide tongues, choked and slow,
> Meeting the Gulf, hosannas silently below.

The pun on "Passion" is perhaps the most ironic in the poem. Christ's Passion is drowned in the river's passion to flow. The River (figuring Process) is man's enemy.

One needs to labor in this way what should be the clearest section of *The Bridge* in order to continually establish the consistent body of attitudes that underlies this poem and gives a continuity to all its sections. It is remarkable how many critics find these last lines (and the whole *River* section) optimistic and full of religious mysticism. I am trying to demonstrate the dualistic vision of experience that molds and pervades each section of the poem, and the hard-minded approach to Art and Myth the diction conveys almost by reflex action. The critic needs such a grasp of the tone of the poem more immediately accessible in sections like "The River" if he is not to write his

own romantic poem when he handles more difficult sections, like "The Dance" following, or the much maligned "Cape Hatteras," or the little understood last section "Atlantis."

"THE DANCE"

The swift red flesh, a winter king—
Who squired the glacier woman down the sky?
She ran the neighing canyons all the spring;
She spouted arms; she rose with maize—to die.

And in the autumn drouth, whose burnished hands
With mineral wariness found out the stone
Where prayers, forgotten, streamed the mesa sands?
He holds the twilight's dim, perpetual throne.

Mythical brows we saw retiring—loth,
Disturbed and destined, into denser green.
Greeting they sped us, on the arrow's oath:
Now lie incorrigibly what years between . . .

The marriage of earth and air, body and spirit—"red flesh" with "woman"—is made by poets of all ages who forge the mythologies of the tribe. The "King" is wintery, the "woman" is also glacial, till the imagination of man (through "love" and "desire") warms the cold earth and our chilled spirits. The cycle of seasons and the cycle of eons is the ground bass of the lines above, indicating as everywhere in *The Bridge*, Crane's constant awareness of the Process. To see canyons as horses, trees as women, mountains as gods, and to pray to stone (Indian motifs) is man's dispensation. Mythical gods and goddesses retire and die, others take their place in the same hail-farewell figuration we noticed in the passage from "Atlantis."

The modern poet attempts to recapture for the reader something like the Indian's sense of integration with nature (as a "lover") in his trip through Space and Time in the Adirondacks.

The mountain's "flanks" are Pocahontas', the shrubbery her "veils," the wind her "hair," the mountain ledge her "inaccessible smile." The poet sees the moon "die" as "immortally it bled into the dawn," stressing once again the dualistic vision of Process which impels this poem. What he sees then once beyond the "inaccessible" ledge is equally dual in its effect on the psychology: thundercloud and cyclone, lightning and crashing oak, as he witnesses the ritualistic marriage and death-by-fire of Maquokeeta, chieftain lover of Pocahontas, while Pocahontas grieves. The section represents certainly Love and Death united in the savage primitive religious consciousness, but it represents more importantly a statement of the tragically mixed blessing of illusion, of myth, on the decidedly unprimitive consciousness:

> Sprout, horn!
> Spark, tooth! Medicine-man, relent, restore—
> Lie to us,—dance us back the tribal morn!

The Dance is representative of the mind's circular motions getting nowhere but where one needs emotionally to be—there where the Indian, or the Pullman break faster for that matter, "surpassed the circumstance, danced out the siege." This section —and the poem—is no tract on immortality as some have made it out; Maquokeeta lives on only in the poetic imagination

> I saw thy change begun!
>
> And saw thee dive to kiss that destiny
> Like one white meteor, sacrosanct and blent
> At last with all that's consummate and free
> There, where the first and last gods keep thy tent.

Freedom, that is, only in death and art. Other men, to the "last of men" will desire "Pocahontas" and bring her down from the glacial, silent wastes in their imaginations, to articulate our dreams in their myths

> High unto Labrador the sun strikes free
> Her speechless dream of snow, and stirred again,
> She is the torrent and the singing tree;
> And she is virgin to the last of men . . .

Over and over again in their seasons men will transform the wind to hair, mountains to breasts. The poet of one age will well understand in the desert reality of his time (as of all times) the ritualistic dance of a brother poet of an earlier age

> We danced, O Brave, we danced beyond their farms,
> In cobalt desert closures made our vows . . .
> Now is the strong prayer folded in thine arms,
> The serpent with the eagle in the boughs.

Each poet achieves a temporary victory over Time and Space in his psychological moment. But the achievement of his prayer is figured in the implausible image of the serpent with the eagle in the boughs.[2] Crane wants the touch of absurdity to color the poem at its ending. It is only a more violent refashioning of the attitude of pathos toward man's hunger for order that is implicit in

> Lo, through what infinite seasons dost thou gaze—
> Across what bivouacs of thin angered slain,
> And see'st thy bride immortal in the maize!

The hunger for the bride can be satisfied only by the imagination's sometime escape from the evils of reality. The dramatization of this fact is what *The Bridge* is all about.

### "Indiana"

The acceptance of that fact is what "Indiana" is all about. One lives by myths, beliefs, golden illusions. The old woman's life has been torn by disillusion but she has reached the state of resignation where "bison thunder rends my dreams no more." The dream of wealth of '59 sent her family traveling far west

but she has returned to middle country, Indiana, Home, the heart that refuses to give in to despair. There is the sweet mythologizing of husband ("Kentucky bred") and bittersweet of son ("stranger," "friend") and of his return, to which she will cling as the Indian mother in the poem clings to her myths, her son. The implications of the poem are that Larry the son will find no better end to his seafaring than his family found in their travels and that he will find no better psychological country than that of the heart poised between dualisms—if he is that lucky. One has little confidence that the son will in fact return to his mother save in memory (especially after reading the next section, "Cutty Sark,")

This last poem of "Powhatan's Daughter" reinforces the essentially tragic tone of the section and the whole poem. The mother desires order as does the poet in Brooklyn, the riders on the Train, and the hobos off it. "Indiana" has been decried as sentimental and hackneyed, as poor late addition to *The Bridge*. It is to me an effective variation on a theme which got a complex and violent figuration in "The Dance," a theme which is given the wider treatment it deserves by the clarity of the "River" poem before "The Dance" and the simplicity and gentleness of "Indiana" after it. I will have more to say of the criticism of "Indiana" and the other late additions in chapter Thirteen, p. 193. For my purposes now it is enough simply to make the claim that the poem is well-integrated thematically and tonally to the whole.

## III. "Cutty Sark"

The title refers both to a brand of alcohol and a type of ship. The pun (here as elsewhere) is quite relevant, referring at once to both the alcoholic dreams of beat sailors and bar-companions ("rum was Plato in our heads") and to poetic "clipper dreams indelible and ranging." The incessant weaving of dreams in life

is the key idea of this section (and of the whole poem). There are the dreams woven by popular music ("Stamboul Rose" or "Green Eyes"), by alcohol or opium, by sailor or by poet in their respective "voyages." Color, noise, and motion—in a psychedelic haze—are necessary to the lost sailor's spiritual condition; his mind is figured as "sands running." He has been conquered by the poem's enemies, Time ("No, I don't want to know what time it is") and Space ("No—I can't live on land —!"). The poet, the sailor's bar-companion, is not so conquered. He is rather meditating throughout this section (as elsewhere) about dreams, weavings, illusions. There is no end to myth making and myth destruction, whether they be woven of shark teeth or sea girls, Stamboul, Yucatan, or Thermopylae, Leander or Ariel, the Idea of Liberty or of Atlantis. The Yankee ships in this surrealistic episode bear names evocative of outworn myth; the juke box finally sings of the dualistic condition:

> Rose of Stamboul O coral Queen—
> teased remnants of the skeletons of cities—
> and galleries, galleries of watergutted lava
> snarling stone—green—drums—drown—
> ATLANTIS ROSE drums wreathe the rose,
> the star floats burning in a gulf of tears
> and sleep another thousand—

Eternal, interminable process of floating and drowning of cities and of myths which inspired those cities (the rose and star figuring such myths). A civilization "weaves" and then "wreaths" the "rose." Puns are rampant; "rose" as Atlantis rising, "Wreath" as death wreath of Atlantis falling. The new "star," new "Atlantis," new "rose," recurs every "thousand" years. Or in another figuration of the Process.

> Perennial *Cutty*—trophied—*Sark!*

Perennial dreams (alcoholic or idealistic) of victory, of "winning the race" in one's voyage, perennial heavings and weavings,

perennial hells (the bar) and tragedy (Leander's shipwreck).

Vulgar dreams and noble myths are merged in the episode to emphasize the root need in all men for the weavings of dream. The need in the lost sailor for instance is to start in the brain

> some white machine that sings.
> Then you may laugh and dance the axletree—
> steel—silver—kick the traces—and know—

The image is deterministic ("white machine that sings"), the dance which figures living within a myth is but kicking the traces. So put concerning the sailor's dreams, one can muster little faith that the poet will gain mystic knowledge either of life (the axletree as ship's wheel) or the universe (the axletree as star). The sailor's song and the poet's song are not so very different; both fight against reality (silver against steel). The diction and imagery of the section is then both vulgar and noble to emphasize the common experience, the endless dreaming in sailor and poet and, by extension, Man facing reality.

The technical accomplishment of this section has been fairly appreciated in the critical literature. The following section's diction and imagery has come in for all sorts of calumny, though its bizarreness has no less an organic purpose. The origin of this study was in the effort to clarify for the reader that purpose and so to properly appreciate the section.

## IV. "Cape Hatteras"

The first lines represent a trip through Time (from the dinosaurs to the airfields) and Space (up and around the stormy Cape, first traveling east, then west). Geography changes; so too man's way of life through time and space is always changing. Time is irrecoverable. Man can recapture the past only in the acts of the imagination

Combustion at the astral core—the dorsal change
Of energy—convulsive shift of sand . . .
But we, who round the capes, the promontories
Where strange tongues vary messages of surf
Below grey citadels, repeating to the stars
The ancient names—return home to our own
Hearths, there to eat an apple and recall
The songs that gypsies dealt us at Marseille
Or how the priests walked—slowly through Bombay—
Or to read you, Walt. . . .

The grey citadels figure past civilizations, myths, orders, names, which please the poet in the same way that returning "home" and "eating an apple" pleases him. Naming and ordering, the imaginative pleasures of the child at home in his world are also the necessary pleasures of the adult (modern) poet. We, like our forebears "vary messages of surf," surf which has no messages really. To read Walt Whitman is to recapture awe in a life that is no longer child's play.

—knowing us in thrall
To that deep wonderment, our native clay
Whose depth of red, eternal flesh of Pocahontas—
Those continental folded aeons, surcharged
With sweetness below derricks, chimneys, tunnels—
Is veined by all that time has really pledged us . . .

The image of deep flesh below derricks being "surcharged with sweetness" (Pocahontas beneath covers) is consciously contrived and near absurd. The "sweetness" of earth, Crane wants to emphasize, is our contribution to it—as are the derricks. Time has pledged us nothing; the River, really, veins the land. We make of Time what we can in our myths of Pocahontas. The pure romantic spirit would see truly God's Body in Nature. Crane, whose diction is so full of ironies, puns, and tortured "metaphysical" conceits brinking on absurdity, is not a romantic, but

one who *hungers* for the coherence of man with the universe that the true romantic *experiences*. It is conscious mythologizing that must console the non-romantic. Walt Whitman, for Crane, represents in fact the poet who experienced as acutely as Crane did the dualistic negations in life and fought them with the poet's resources: with "Sea eyes and Tidal, undenying, bright with myth," myth that is fighting the sea which would overwhelm and deny man. It is Walt who wields the "rebound seed." "Rebound seed" does not communicate unless one has felt Crane's continuous theme and tone; the poet through myth plants grass incessantly where storm incessantly rages and destroys, he "wields" the "seed" as a weapon; there is no end to the battle.

The idea (often-expressed) that this section is full of cosmic optimism expressed in pointlessly mannered language, that it is confused, willfully denying the pessimism of other sections of a hopelessly out-of-control poem, comes from a superficial reading of the section and the whole. Crane is very precise and careful in his language to point the attitudes he wishes to convey. The section's main idea is that the task of the poetic consciousness is today essentially the same as it always was (it is an ancient, "sanskrit" charge), only harder. There are "new verities," "new latitudes," "new integers" of which to make new myths. The section is thus full of the language used in old myth (swords and monsters) and also the language of the "new verities" (ball bearings )which must be "conjugated" into new myths. The job will be done in spite of "ghoul-mounds" of war below and fearsome, endless space above, by the "span of consciousness" that Whitman calls the "open road" and we call the imaginative capacity of the poet. The tone that emerges from Crane's unique diction is not one of mystic optimism but of a humanistic determination not to be driven down by storm and space. Crane is *not* Walt Whitman who could feel in his best

moments "the seas all crossed, weathered the capes, the voyage done . . ." Whitman is angelic to Crane in the sense that Whitman fought so well against the demonic:

> Beyond all sesames of science was thy choice
> Wherewith to bind us throbbing with one voice,
> New Integers of Roman, Viking, Celt—
> Thou, Vedic Caesar, to the greensward knelt!
>
> And now, as launched in abysmal cupolas of space,
> Toward endless terminals, Easters of speeding light—
> Vast engines outward veering with seraphic grace
> On clarion cylinders pass out of sight
> To course that span of consciousness thou'st named
> The Open Road—

Roman, Viking, Celt, and the Vedic writings are ancient "integers," whole myths complete with sufficient heavens. Integration via myth is the poet's vocation. The Victorian fear of man's alienation from nature impelled Whitman's finding with some desparation divinity in the grass. The binding together of men, now finally alienated from one another, is the modern task, to create—absurdly—new heavens ("Easters") of the endless abyss of space and new seraphs with new clarions out of engines. It is a question of self-preservation, and it was Whitman, of American poets, who first had inklings of the full dimensions of the question:

> Our Meistersinger, thou set breath in steel;
> And it was thou who on the boldest heel
> Stood up and flung the span on even wing
> Of that great Bridge, our Myth, whereof I sing!

Again the conscious irony, half-parody of "Meistersinger," with the hint of teutonic pompousness, of the "whereof I sing," alluding to America's patriotic song. There *is* absurdity in setting "breath in steel." There is also boldness, audacity, and necessity in doing so. We must have a "great Bridge, Our Myth." I re-

iterate what is transparent in the phrase: that Hart Crane's *Bridge* is about myth, its efficacy (its necessity), and the poet as myth-maker. It is not about the truth of any given myth.

We will never be overwhelmed by water, neither will we conquer it: "Travail of Tides . . . Fail not less than thou . . ." In imagery which has the same overtones of absurdity as the above, Crane sees our "periscope" (a machine representing the imagination) coming always to a "focus" (integration of myth) but always then "deflecting" us into the submersed labyrinth again. The figure for the process is the circle:

> The circle, blind crucible of endless space,
> Is sluiced by motion,—subjugated never.
> Adam and Adam's answer in the forest
> Left Hesperus mirrored in the lucid pool.

Adam's desire for Eve (as ours for integration) gave *him* no ultimate fulfillment. His answer to Eve had tragic consequences, as did Hesperus' longing. Life ever mirrors this tragic dualism of desire and unfulfillment.

All answers answer only for a time. As love and death make an eternal cycle so too the domination of Time and Space returns to destroy man's myths of the conquering of these:

> Now the eagle dominates our days. . . .
> . . . Dream cancels dream in this new realm of fact
> From which we wake into the dream of act;

The pace of the alternation is stepped up in modern times where myth can hardly hold without the beliefs of past ages. So that when Crane refers to Whitman in the lines

> "—Recorders ages hence"—ah, syllables of faith!
> Walt, tell me, Walt Whitman, if infinity
> Be still the same as when you walked the beach
> Near Paumanok—

The implicit answer to the question is no, the implicit attitude of Crane is that he finds rather touching Whitman's certainty that his vision, his mythologizing, will suffice for later ages, not to speak of Crane's own age

> The nasal whine of power whips a new universe . . .
> Towards what? . . .
> Stars scribble on our eyes the frosty sagas,
> The gleaming cantos of unvanquished space . . .
> What ciphers risen from prophetic script,
> What marathons new-set between the stars! . . .
> New latitudes, unknotting, soon give place
> To what fierce schedules, rife of doom apace!

The essential vision of these lines and the ground vision of the poem is that history is directionless, a cyclic unknotting of new doomed universes. Mankind weaves warm myths, sagas, cantos, of cold ever-unvanquished space, sets new marathons up in the old stars, there where man has placed many other such in human history.

There are war plants and airfields on Cape Hatteras ("war's fiery kennel") and these are testimony to the recurring failure of man's poetry and humanism:

> While Iliads glimmer through eyes raised in pride
> Hell's belt springs wider into heaven's plumed side.

We have then a verse paragraph describing allegorically modern man's laudable, venturesome, "siege" on space, literally in the airplane (javelin), figuratively in the overcoming of one's sense of meaninglessness in infinite space. The verse paragraph following laments man's self-destructive madness: the plane (griffon) bombing the people (fencers) below who search and shell the warplane above. The pilot, figuring the poet, is charged to restore order, not to aid chaos and destruction. The price of opting

instead for war and destruction is the "dance," not of mythic integration, but of death. The "pilot" committed to "war" (chaos) is only blessed by death—

> here at this height receive
> The benediction of the shell's deep, sure reprieve!

The message of the difficult allegory is that only by the realization that man must live with a consoling myth of himself and his universe can modern man subjugate modern life to poetic vision. And that is what Walt Whitman has bequeathed to us—not a specific, true mysticism to explain the universe, but the irrepressible urge to poeticize whatever universe we are up against. And so Crane refashions his initial apostrophe to Whitman:

> O Joyous seer!
> Recorders ages hence, yes, they shall hear
> In their own veins uncancelled thy sure tread . . .
> Yes, Walt,
> Afoot again, and onward without halt,—

Future poets will hear in their veins, that is, respond as it were biologically to the need for positive myth, and so ever go hand in hand with Whitman, not as disciples to a creed but as brothers in the blood.

To see "Cape Hatteras" as either committed mysticism or a forced optimism about space and/or machines is to see the section with a most parabolic periscope. The diction is of doubt and qualification, not unbounded confidence and optimism. There is a strength in the diction that comes from a clear analysis of situation. The poem as a whole has, I feel, this clarity concerning a complex situation of the poet and response to the situation. Too much criticism of Crane however sees the poem and especially this section as a forced and confused handling of what was once supposedly a clear and simple transcendental intent.

The attitude, the tone, is conveyed by the diction, and to miss the purposes of the one is to miss the other.

## V. "Three Songs"

The next two sections of *The Bridge* (V and VI) have come in for some hard critical knocks not so much for lack of intrinsic merit (it is too hard to deny the technical accomplishment of, at least, the "Three Songs"), as for their point and place in the "structure" or "form" of the text. It is obvious from my explication thus far that I find Crane running variations on a set of attitudes about a cyclic and dualistic view of life which we call Process, and about the values of myth superimposed on the Process. I find no dialectic which rigorously ordains the sections we have, no special revelations to be gained through the sequence of sections. There are certainly all sorts of verbal and imagistic echoes or counterpointings from section to section (recent criticism has tended to focus on these) which enrich each variation on the continuous theme (or, better, set of themes). But the sort of criticism that seeks for archetypal or generic patterns in unique works of art has wanted these next two sections to do more and other than they do and so the sections have often either been 1) denigrated or 2) wrenched into dialectic formation.

### "Southern Cross"

The epigraph to "Three Songs" from Marlowe's "Hero and Leander" refers to the water and the opposite shores which separate the two lovers. There was no "bridge" and Leander perished in the water. The "Woman of the South" desired here, it is clear, will not be had either; the poet is resigned to the impossibility of attaining her. She represents the desire in man for a warm permanent heaven for the spirit, where it is no longer

chilled by loneliness, the wide stars and waters, or burned by the lusts and other fires of human life. The hunger is always for heaven, not one more myth of heaven ("no wraith, but utterly"), for the "nameless woman" ("God") of which Eve, Magdalen, or Mary represent only imperfect aspects. The poet however is represented as having seen the futility of that hunger.

> And this long wake of phosphor,
> iridescent
> Furrow of all our travel—trailed derision!
> Eyes crumble at its kiss. Its long-drawn spell
> Incites a yell. Slid on that backward vision
> The mind is churned to spittle, whispering hell.

The furrow of mankind's travels is made up of the "lithic trillions" of man's desires, the millions of heavens turned to hells of derision. This is the modern poet's "backward vision" into history. As we have seen warm goddesses in cold galaxies such as the Southern Cross, so have we spawned children of desire out of the cold stinging wash of the waves. All myths, "words," "names," "calls" incessantly "fall vainly on the wave": "windswept guitars on lonely decks forever." Myth is accomplished by many men, the nameless woman's lovers. Crane too is spawning a "phantom" of his "unloved seed" in his poem. "Day" (reality, time) drowns our myths (as dawn the constellations). Crane manages the detachment here of "backward vision"—the examination of a hunger now understood and controlled—which enables him in the next two lyrics to examine the classic dualisms of what we call the Flesh and the Spirit as exhibited in modern man with a fine eye for limitations and complexities.

"National Winter Garden"

> . . . Yet to the empty trapeze of your flesh,
> O Magdalene, each comes back to die alone.
> Then you, the burlesque of our lust—and faith,
> Lug us back lifeward—bone by infant bone.

The attitude towards Magdalene (the Flesh) is made complex—and satisfying—in this last stanza of the poem which, till this stanza, had seemed a brilliant, entertaining, and simple denunciation of modern lust and spiritual emptiness ("and shall we call her whiter than the snow? . . . We flee her spasm through a fleshless door . . .") But the truth is, as Crane realizes, the flesh is a necessary "clinch." The implication is that it is thus much more than mere clinch, but an integral part of the spiritual hunger (thus "cloudy," a mystery). Modern man *has* degraded "lust" in equating it with the burlesque queen, but lust is *always* degrading . . . *and* necessary. The need for union with another flesh and spirit, the desire for capturing, having completely, both body and soul of a woman is like the hunger for complete relation, possession, faith, in self, universe, and God. All these hungers are instinctive and compulsive, as an infant's hunger. The wanting, the impossibility of having is the dualistic condition. The cyclic coming back to Magdalene ("back lifeward"—a poised ambiguity) is like the poet's poignant images of myth-making in "Southern Cross" of recurring heavens turning to recurring hells. As one must accept the limitations implicit in the need for Magdalene, so must one accept the limitations of myth to satisfy one's hunger for "God."

### "Virginia"

The spirit has undergone the same degradation, the same reduction as the flesh in our time. One has hungered body and soul for the nameless woman but she does not respond. "Virginia" is about the limited, necessary, rather fleshless modern religious consciousness (in contrast to Pocahontas—the original Virginian —and her state of spirit) represented by Mary the secretary. Mary is rather winning and pleasant to Crane, as is the lower and middle class urban spirit she represents ("popcorn bells," "nickel-dime tower"). Mary, in her scarf, is the good girl who

enters the cathedral on a sunshiny day to pray for her boss who makes passes, and for herself ("Mary[what are you going to do?]") while, say, her brother gambles on Bleecker Street.

The whole sweet neighborhood drama is built on myth, especially the glorious ideal of the Virgin Mary and her Son. Crane is drawn towards the Virgin as the closest approximation to the spirit's hunger for the "nameless woman of the South"; "Saturday Mary," patterning herself as best she can after the Virgin, is one more representative of the hunger. She is as the wheat goddess, or Rapunzel in the tower, or Eve, or Magdalene, only she (like the modern imagination) is more limited, constricted and constrained (the figs and oysters, as sexual motifs, gently mock her). Living her myth may well bring her loneliness and sadness in a world hardly for her; the poet hopes not, but there is nothing to be done. The poet's position is that living within some myth is necessary, whether it be tonally of Pocahontas or of popcorn bells. The poem is a witty, poised and gentle satire with a warm, humanistic understanding and empathy for the need to believe in something. One must accept Mary and Magdalene in lieu of the desired Woman of the South.

## VI. "Quaker Hill"

So, must we from the hawk's far stemming view,
Must we descend as worm's eye to construe
Our love of all we touch, and take it to the Gate
As humbly as a guest who knows himself too late,
His news already told? Yes, while the heart is wrung,
Arise—yes, take this sheaf of dust upon your tongue!
In one last angelus lift throbbing throat—
Listen, transmuting silence with that stilly note

Of pain that Emily, that Isadora knew!
While high from dim elm-chancels hung with dew,
That triple-noted clause of moonlight—

Yes, whip-poor-will, unhusks the heart of fright,
Breaks us and saves, yes, breaks the heart, yet yields
That patience that is armour and that shields
Love from despair—when love foresees the end—
Leaf after autumnal leaf
break off,
descend—
descend—

Noble myths of ourselves ("the hawk's far stemming view") come out of the humble human heart which suffers always pain, fright, despair, and death. It is an old story we tell, of the Love and Patience we "construct" (construe) out of our lonely Dust and Desire (flesh and spirit); "angelus" comes paradoxically out of our resignation to the human condition. This passage perhaps better than any other in *The Bridge* speaks of the fundamental dualistic vision of Crane, his recognition of man's cyclic tragedy and of his "saving" or consoling myths. There are mentioned in this section the public myths, Indian, Quaker, and Yankee, and also the private mythologies of those who, like Crane, would build life on the "bridges" of friendship and family (faiths hard to hold onto, given man's unkindliness to man—especially, says Crane, in this huckstering age)—

Who holds the lease on time and on disgrace?
What eats the pattern with ubiquity?
Where are my kinsmen and the patriarch race?

The answer to the first question is that no one does, we all do; the answer to the second is that Time is the beast; to the third that they are all gone or are going, family and the myths of family and race. We all have "eyes that still uphold some dream," a dream that will in its turn become a "cancelled reservation." Man's dreams have perhaps no significant relations to the reality he looks out upon and in which he must work out his mortal destiny:

. . . . . I have seen death's stare in slow survey
From four horizons that no one relates. . . .

Cattle, unconscious, do not care about the "seasons fleeting." Men only, after such survey of all things falling (men, houses, dreams), moves on from the survey to the "So" of the passage above, to the construction of patience and love (angelus) out of despair and death.

## VII. "The Tunnel"

The answer to despair in the preceding section was given really in each section: that the creation of myths of ourselves and our relations to each other and to the universe are all that time has really pledged us. The last two sections of *The Bridge* dramatize again Despair (in "The Tunnel") and Desire (angelus of the Bridge-as-Myth in "Atlantis"). They are, as I see it, but two variations—of greater intensity perhaps than others in the poem —on a theme we have recognized from the structure and logic of the first two stanzas of the poem. I do not think, that is, that the whole poem is moving dialectically toward "Atlantis." The dualism that informs the poem is simply made starkly clear by the juxtapositioning of "The Tunnel" against "Atlantis" as impulses of equal intensity within the poet. The poem is not a failure because the impulses admit of reconciliation only through myths in the aesthetic moments—the poem is *of* this realization down to the last choice of word. One can metacritically attack the vision itself, but not, I think, the continuity of the vision in the poem.

Someday, Crane says to the kindred reader in the opening lines of "The Tunnel," you will give yourself up rather completely to despair for a while—examine the true sickness in your heart as you live as a mechanical man in a mechanical city. You will admit the hell, the ennui in the "theatre" or the "dead

garden" that is your mind, and in your reflex habits towards yourself and others. In the subway, man has built a "river" beneath rivers, gone nature one better in reducing man from insignificance to nothing

> And so
> of cities you bespeak
> subways, rivered under streets
> and rivers . . . In the car
> the overtone of motion
> underground, the monotone
> of motion is the sound
> of other faces, also underground—

The monotone is of the subways' rails but also from the lips of the travelers—"our tongues recant like beaten weather vanes." There is a pun on recant: literally, "sing again" (but no angelus this), also "take back" (as what they are saying adds up to nothing). That man adds up to nothing is the "answer" that "lives like verdigris, like hair beyond extinction." This sort of despairing answer to the modern poet's desire for meaning and value (love is a "burnt match skating in a urinal"; we are like corpses swinging from straps, near violent psychotics) is the demonic aspect of our dualistic personalities speaking. Poe (perhaps better, Baudelaire) can be spokesman for the Daemon within, as Whitman speaks for the Angel within. One might expect daemonic despair to overcome the "Wop washerwoman" who cleans corridors and cuspidors in the skyscrapers (the "giant skybarracks"). But it is possible that she lives within an angelic myth though she travels the subways.

> O Genoese, do you bring mother eyes and hands
> Back home to children and to golden hair?

It is the poet, not the laborer, who is most likely, with his continued meditation on the value of myth and its transcience, to succumb to the daemon within:

Daemon, demurring and eventful yawn!
Whose hideous laughter is a bellows mirth
—Or the muffled slaughter of a day in birth—
O cruelly to inoculate the brinking dawn
With antennae toward worlds that glow and sink;—
To spoon us out more liquid than the dim
Locution of the eldest star, and pack
The conscience navelled in the plunging wind,
Umbilical to call—and straightway die!

The daemon within is the skeptical, denying side of the mind which laughs at the imaginative, myth-making side of the same mind; it is a sort of Jekyll-Hyde affair. We are—in a consciously perverse image out of surgery and zoology—"inoculated with antennae." That is, we have bred in the bone the wish for meaningful, transcendent worlds in which to live (worlds which necessarily "sink"). The evil doctor also gives the "baby" a nourishing liquid (desire for transcendence) that the meaningless (therefore "wordless," "voiceless") planetary waters will not be able to supply to the adult. To navel our conscience to the wind is to insure its death as the wind is but motion, not coherent Word.

O caught like pennies beneath soot and steam
Kiss of our agony thou gatherest;
Condensed, thou takest all—shrill ganglia
Impassioned with some song we fail to keep.
And yet, like Lazarus, to feel the slope,
The sod and billow breaking,—lifting ground,
—A sound of waters bending astride the sky
Unceasing with some Word that will not die . . .!

The poet fights the daemon (thou) within with the resources he has: call, song, myth, forced and condensed out of his agony, out of the poet's "shrill ganglia" in the mind. The song does not last; the waters of Time keep flowing. And yet the song is all that gives us in moments what seem to be transcendental in-

timations ("to *feel* the slope") that can satisfy the desire for permanence and absolutes ("Word") that we have in us. Having forced the lyric cry, our daemon, skeptic side paradoxically takes on the character of unconscious, unwilling angel. We, mankind, are (like Lazarus once) constantly dying and constantly being born again: Tunnel, Bridge, Tunnel, Bridge.

> And this thy harbor, O my City, I have driven under,
> Tossed from the coil of ticking towers . . . Tomorrow,
> And to be . . . Here by the River that is East—
> Here at the waters' edge the hands drop memory;
> Shadowless in that abyss they unaccounting lie.
> How far away the star has pooled the sea—
> Or shall the hands be drawn away, to die?

The Process is forever, our hands fabricating myth, drawing the cold distant star down close to us, making the sea a pool, gathering together and condensing agony into angelus and finally dropping memory, losing myth, meaning, and value (the work of hands) and drawing away to die.

But then in a reformulation of the earlier apostrophe to the daemon within and an echoing of Columbus' praise to the Lord, Crane ends the "Tunnel" section with a statement suggesting a God outside Time by whose hand we are tortured and blessed at once—

> Kiss of our agony Thou gatherest,
> O Hand of Fire
> gatherest—

The expression is infinitely suggestive and obviously meant to be so by Crane so as to circumvent any absolute statement about the existence of a transcendental power. Here as elsewhere in the poem the desire for transcendental meaning to a heavily dualistic existence is what is being dramatized. The continuous drama of

the poem's dualism is not subsumed in the invocation to the Hand of Fire, the invocation is one aspect of the drama.

## VIII. "Atlantis"

I EXAMINED A PASSAGE from "Atlantis" above in conjunction with the "Proem." I hope that what I said there by way of beginning my analysis of *The Bridge* may now seem more convincing than it possibly did then: 1) "Atlantis" is, as the "Proem" is, and the whole poem, a feat of language, of language very careful, precise and exact, calculated to give full due to the exhilarations of myth-making, while never committing itself to any myth of permanence, 2) the language here, as in the "Proem," and the poem, is not gratuitously mannered but consciously tortured to express a precise response to dualistic experiences, 3) the language of religious mysticism is used here and in the poem, to express not mystic truths but the tortured desire for these, the hunger for transcendental experience as but one aspect in the poem of the total attitudes toward the mythic imagination and man's need for myth, 4) the poet realizes always the near-absurdity of his "transcendental" passages, as he did in his religious addresses to the bridge, of angelus emergent from the Tunnel; and his diction, with its ironies, paradoxes and conceits, expresses this poised attitude toward his material. Criticism has found "Atlantis" very difficult to deal with. I propose to give the section a line-by-line reading from my point of view, and I must leave it to the reader to decide whether my analysis of the section clarifies the lines and the intent of "Atlantis" better than other (usually Platonic, transcendental) readings.[3]

"Music is of Love" Crane takes from Plato. Crane's music is of the love (desire) for meaning and order. The bridge represents here, as everywhere in the poem, the ordering, the binding ("bound cable strands") of chaotic experience ("moonlight syncopate . . . up the index of night"); its "sibylline voices flicker,

waveringly stream/*as though* a god were issue of the strings." Its "prophecy," is intermittent (flickering, wavering). Then it is *as though* one knows "God." Crane stays carefully below the supernatural in his upward path towards it.

There is a similar "as though" in the second stanza. It is, when one is happy within an order, *as if* history's labyrinth could be woven into one cloth, one arc be synoptic of all tides, as if all ships, all voyagers in all ships, ride river and ocean purposefully bound towards one dream or goal—then it is that "seven oceans answer from their dream." Crane realizes here as elsewhere in the image of the ocean's answering, which brinks on absurdity, that a permanent sense of unity is a pathetic impossibility in the daily reality.

His music of *The Bridge* he knows is but "new octaves" (as the "new verities," "new integers" of "Cape Hatteras") of the old songs of the Process; the "arcs" he creates—represented by the arcs formed by the "twin monoliths" of Brooklyn Bridge—are "worlds of sleep." Myth-making is a process of imagining, of fabricating "crystal" aisles from lit cable, "silver terraces" from spars, and helmeted heroes from stars. The imaginative transformation of reality into myth (Bridge) is the "loft," the topmost of "vision." Crane is carefully speaking of poetic vision which ever ascends but never reaches what mystic vision supposedly does.

Now the tragic implications of the next stanza (the fourth) need to be clear:

> Sheerly the eyes, like seagulls stung with rime—
> Slit and propelled by glistening fins of light—
> Pick biting way up towering looms that press
> Sidelong with flight of blade on tendon blade
> —Tomorrows into yesteryear—and link
> What cipher-script of time no traveller reads
> But who, through smoking pyres of love and death,
> Searches the timeless laugh of mythic spears.

Hungry sea gulls, salt in the eyes and tendon-tired, follow fish fins and bite to grasp and end their hunger. Man's ("slit") eyes likewise follow bridge cable (the ordering of myth) hungry, "stung with rime" (with the pun on rhyme), seeking to escape inescapable time and death. Tomorrow's myths will someday be yesterday's myths—eternally. Myths of man's "love" and "heroism" in the search are all that time gives us, they are time's "cipher-script," all we have in answer to our questionings.

The following stanza which I examined above (p. 152) has equally tragic implications in the eternal cycle of hail-farewell to the myths of Tyre, Troy, Greece, etc., the harnessing of air and water endlessly. I add only to what I said earlier that the reference to the "trillion hammers" which fabricate myth parallels the "lithic trillions" of poets' "spawn" (in "Southern Cross") which ever drown.

Myths are visions-of-the-voyage, that is, dramatizations of every Jason's experiences ("terrible of drums") in life. Myth lifts "night to cycloramic crest of deepest day." As trough follows crest, night follows day, cyclically, poetic myth likewise keeps fusing syllables of time into Verbs.

> O Choir, translating time
> Into what multitudinous Verb the suns
> And synergy of waters ever fuse, recast
> In myriad syllables,—Psalm of Cathay!
> O Love, thy white, pervasive Paradigm . . . !
>
> Pacific here at time's end, bearing corn.—
> Eyes stammer through the pangs of dust and steel.
> And still the circular, indubitable frieze
> Of heaven's meditation, yoking wave
> To kneeling wave, one song devoutly binds—
> The vernal strophe chimes from deathless strings!

The Bridge represents mythic ordering (Choir or Verb are variations). It translates Time's disorders into mythic action, fuses

sun and water (reality without myth) into syllables of Cathay or Atlantis, or what you will. Myths are by definition then paradigms of desire ("love" again representing the desire for order; "God," "Love," "Flower," "Word," "Everpresence" representing the platonic Ideal or Absolute for which we hunger, "Bridge" representing the psychological achieving of desire through mythic order). Thus translated into myth Time is "pacific" and "bears corn" (as in vegetation myths). Myth binds and yokes in the songs ("vernal strophe") of "springtime": the "winter" of the mind is represented by the "dust and steel" of reality without myth. The absurdity then to the skeptical eye of waves "kneeling" is conscious; they kneel only to the imaginative eye. The Process is cyclic, circular: "Spring" alternating with "Winter," "Heaven" with "Hell." This is the dualistic vision of experience proper.

And now in the direct apostrophe to the Bridge in the five stanzas that end the poem, we have the summation of the poet's attitudes towards myth and myth-building.

> Thou steeled Cognizance whose leap commits
> The agile precincts of the lark's return;
> Within whose lariat sweet encinctured sing
> In single chrysalis the many twain,—
> Of stars Thou art the stitch and stallion glow
> And like an organ, Thou, with sound of doom—
> Sight, sound and flesh Thou leadest from time's realm
> As love strikes clear direction for the helm.

The leap into myth (the bridge as myth) one must notice is the creating of a "precinct," a "cincturing" within a boundary where, as in the safety of a chrysalis, man can conquer his fear of disorder (the "many twain") and of infinite space ("of stars Thou art the stitch"). Within myth one can image heroes and heroes' stallions in the stars, desire ("love") dictating the whole direc-

tion of mythic wars—in a real universe where nothing, especially wars, seems to have direction ("Years of the Modern! Propulsions toward what capes?"). Within the boundaries of myth man controls his doom.

> Swift peal of secular light, intrinsic Myth
> Whose fell unshadow is death's utter wound,—
> O River-throated—iridescently upborne
> Through the bright drench and fabric of our veins;
> With white escarpments swinging into light,
> Sustained in tears the cities are endowed
> And justified conclamant with ripe fields
> Revolving through their harvests in sweet torment.

Myth without belief save in its efficacy is rightly termed secular; swift it will be in its birth and destruction (its "peal"), intrinsic it is in the compulsive necessity for order in man which it satisfies ("upborne through the bright drench and fabric of our veins"). It is the opposite of death's fell shadow; it is in Crane's phrase a "fell unshadow," that is, it is life-giving though it is doomed, it speaks not of darkness but of light though it can do no more than dramatize man's fate (it is "River-throated"). Mythmaking is immortal though myths and makers are not. Myth gives joy which of necessity gives way to tears and then new myth returns, as fields endure the sweet torment of spring following winter. Crane's urban symbol, the bridge, illustrates myth's beneficence in expressing the ancient hunger for Absolutes for its time, just as ancient vegetal myths expressed the same for their time:

> Forever Deity's glittering Pledge, O Thou
> Whose canticle fresh chemistry assigns
> To rapt inception and beautitude,—
> Always through blinding cables, to our joy,
> Of thy white seizure springs the prophecy:

Always through spiring cordage, pyramids
Of silver sequel, Deity's young name
Kinetic of white choiring wings . . . ascends.

Migrations that must needs void memory,
Inventions that cobblestone the heart,—
Unspeakable Thou Bridge to Thee, O Love.
Thy pardon for this history, whitest Flower,
O Answerer of all,—Anemone,—
Now while thy petals spend the suns about us, hold—
(O Thou whose radiance doth inherit me)
Atlantis,—hold thy floating singer late!

Myth is what man is pledged: forever and always "fresh" myths, new prophecies, new pyramids for new times (chemistry in canticles), new birds "building high" above the old "chained bay waters," new apparitions, new inventions, new sequels. To be caught up in myth is *like* prophecy, seizure, mystic experience, but always then "migrations . . . void memory [and] . . . cobblestone the heart." The Process moves on to new myths, voiding the old. One must not miss the double-edgedness of "cobblestone" and "unspeakable," of the everlasting Flower's petals sustaining the poet only for "now," and of the poet's fear of drowning. The language is drenched in dualism though the careless reader will find it bathed in certainty and optimism. The paean is to the creative imagination of man, man who will *not* be without gods, or myth, or joy; whose "love" is the desire for Absolutes in a World of Impermanence. One creates one's Bridge to "Atlantis," "Cathay," to the "Flower" and then, as the lily on the water, one dies, and leaves the poem as heritage. The poem *The Bridge* is not Crane's myth of America or God, but *about* myth; therefore the lines "Thy pardon for this history, whitest Flower" and following, to the end. The modern poet here apologizes for his dualism of vision which makes impossible a truly religious commitment to the Absolute for which he hun-

gers. But one need not apologize for the hunger for beauty, for order in the human spirit.

> So to thine Everprescence, beyond time,
> Like spears ensanguined of one tolling star
> That bleeds infinity—the orphic strings,
> Sideral phalanxes, leap and converge:
> —One Song, one Bridge of Fire! Is it Cathay,
> Now pity steeps the grass and rainbows ring
> The serpent with the eagle in the leaves. . . . ?
> Whispers antiphonal in azure swing.

The poem ends as it began with equivocal questions, not mystic affirmation. Is it Cathay? Atlantis? What symbol you will, it is all the same—myths are a constant creation of heavens from hells, of putting serpent together with eagle in leaves, of sensing God's pity in dew and God's power in the rainbow. One side of the mind whispers of heavens and integration, the other skeptic side whispers hell and disintegration, and "Whispers antiphonal in azure swing." Orpheus the poet could inspire armies but could not save his love from hell. The poet as Orphic hero fights with the enemy (the tolling star in chill infinite space) and draws blood, the healing blood of the sense of relation to infinity through myth. We live in a reality of Fire and Blood and do our best to sanctify life despite pain. One would like God beyond Time to make it all true, but Crane's Psalm is not to God but to the Bridge, to the myths of God which sustain us and to the spirit of man which creates the myths out of hope and out of desire. The form of *The Bridge* is that of antiphonal music—a dramatization of opposing responses toward life, and the controlled response to myth as both salvation and apparition.

# 13

# The Critics

The preceding essay was to establish what I call the tone—and the continuity of tone—of Hart Crane's *The Bridge*. I find that tone in the poet's realization and acceptance of man's endless mythmaking about himself and his world. The poet is confident of no visionary kingdom, higher reality, truth, or immortality at the end of a personal or collective voyage—only of the cyclic alternation between a sense of order (whether personal or collective) and a sense of chaos. Men hunger for the truth of a Permanent or Absolute Vision and this hunger causes the creation of mythic orders. The dualistic vision finds unity only in the poetic consciousness which weaves myth or beauty out of dream. This is what we have of blessedness.

This body of attitudes represents, I think, the true dynamic of the poem. The precise and accurate articulation of the central

body of attitudes, the objective tone, which impels a work of art is, I have argued, the fundamental critical act. If I have probed that tone correctly, then my articulation should now put into focus the critical accuracy of the various published critiques of the work. I intend this chapter also as a demonstration of the wide variety of metacritical operations loosely called critical, as a final plea for the narrowing and sharpening of our definition of the word.

A passage from Philip Horton's biography of Crane summarizes the biographical nexus from which so much of the comment on Crane's poem comes:

> But in the period between 1925 and 1927 his spirit began to flag. The vigor and idealism of his earlier days was sapped from without by the incessant demands of a society persistently indifferent to what he had conceived to be its national destiny, and consumed from within by the cancerous growth of his own moral conflicts. He himself had written that without faith in his materials he could not create, and the fact that "The River" was his last major achievement would seem to corroborate the statement. Henceforth his progress on *The Bridge* was painfully slow. At times he deliberately sought distractions, fleeing from the hypocrisy of completing a work in which he no longer believed, only to return to it eventually, driven by the fear of ridicule and conclusive failure. It was a failure he could not face, for almost from the day he had written his first poem he had placed in his writing his only hope of attaining security and recognition. Much more than is easily understood, it was a question of life and death for him that he finish *The Bridge*. Accordingly, his poetry had become an activity of the will rather than of the spirit. But even his will at times threatened to founder in the dark flood of despair or the void of bitter isolation.
>
> (*Hart Crane: The Life of an American Poet* (1937), p. 236)

The passage bristles with many hidden and many overt assumptions, judgments, and I think, simplifications. The underlying attitude that impels the passage (and book) is, of all things flagging in Crane, physical, moral, spiritual, and artistic. An early idealism is postulated intimately connected with a sense of an American destiny, an idealism in which Crane comes to lose faith as ruinous despair conquers his psyche. The documentation for the passage is of course material made public by people who knew Crane and by a biographical reading of Crane's letters, essays, and poems. The material all happens to be fascinating, but such material ought to have no critical status at all. If the critic has read nothing about Crane but read *The Bridge* over and over, and finds *The Bridge* a major piece of poetry, and also finds in the poem an acutely aware and accepting spirit dramatizing through his diction a felt dualism everywhere in the poem (in sections written early or late, the late as interesting as the early) using American mythic materials consciously as but one example of the process of mythmaking, such a critic must then judge the passage above of biographical reconstruction as of no critical relevance to the poem. It, he must say, simply does not tally with the attitudes of the poem, and the poem is all that matters. *Why* it does not is another question, but is not a question for criticism.

Once a biographical schema gets set on automatic pilot, the critical language becomes impressionistic, heavily dramatic, and, I hope to show, imprecise:

> In October he was able to dispatch to the Crosbys the final version of "Cape Hatteras," and a month later he sent off "Quaker Hill" and "Indiana," which he completed in a rage of disappointment.
>
> .
>
> Released at last from the long struggle of finishing *The Bridge*, Crane still found no escape from the familiar nightmares of anxiety and fear. None knew better than he that these last three sections

fell far short of the rest of the poem, and no one doubted his achievement more than himself . . . He knew well enough that he had lost his faith and that the temper of his spirit had become almost diametrically opposed to his original vision. It was even more than fortunate—perhaps it was even prophetic—that "Atlantis," the final apocalyptic paean, had been written first; for it is doubtful whether he could now have recaptured the intense mystical conviction of his early years.

He found it difficult enough to write "Cape Hatteras," which he had conceived as an ode to Whitman, a reaffirmation of his faith in the American spirit. In the effort to whip himself up to the buoyant breath of optimism that the subject demanded he fell into bathos and committed aesthetic sins that never ceased to plague his conscience. (Horton, pp. 201-2)

These passages encase the widely-held opinions about the last three sections written—that they are poor and that Crane at the end had little faith in them or in the poem which had begun in optimism based on an idealistic, mystic, or apocalyptic faith. As has been made clear, my overall reading of the tone of the poem rejects the motivations and intentions Horton finds in Crane—early or late vintage. And how different an impression is conveyed by some of Crane's letters of the same period Horton is treating:

I'm too rushed to type you out a final copy of this finale to the "Cape Hatteras" section yet, but you can get some idea of what I'm accomplishing by the muddled copy I'm including herewith. You'll have the final version—including what you read in Paris—within a few days, aeronautics and all. It looks pretty good to me, and at least according to *my* ideas of *The Bridge* this edition wouldn't be complete or even representative without it.

(September 6, 1929)

Dear Caresse: I sent you, registered, the "Cape Hatteras" last version. But retyping it for a magazine, I couldn't help glimpsing

some necessary improvements. So please use this *second* version, as enclosed. I vow that you'll be troubled by no further emendations—excepting perhaps a comma or so on the proofs.

Since I'm writing I can't help saying that I'm highly pleased with the way I've been able to marshal the notes and agonies of the last two years' effort into a rather arresting synthesis.

(September 17, 1929)

I am so pleased that you continue to enjoy *The Bridge*. I admit having felt considerably jolted at the charge of sentimentality continually levelled at the "Indiana" fragment, particularly when such charges came from people who acknowledged a violent admiration for Hardy's poetry. For many of his lyrics have seemed to me at least as "sentimental" as this "mawkish" performance of my own. But I approve of a certain amount of sentiment anyway . . . I can't help thinking that, observed in the proper perspective, and judged in relation to the argument or theme of the Pocahontas section as a whole, the pioneer woman's maternalism isn't excessive. (November 21, 1930)

The fact is too that in 1927 (as seen in a letter to Otto Kahn) Crane had a version of "Indiana" (with a father speaking, a mother dead) "well nigh done." He had had in addition this to say of "Cape Hatteras":

"Cape Hatteras," which follows, is unfinished. It will be a kind of ode to Whitman. I am working as much as possible on it now. It presents very formidable problems, as indeed, all the sections have. I am really writing an epic of the modern consciousness, and indescribably complicated factors have to be resolved and blended

(September 12, 1927)

My point is that whatever the reasons for the dilatoriness of '28 or the rush to finish in '29 Crane in the twenties apparently lived in what he felt was a continual meditation on rather fixed attitudes toward experience (reality) and his poetry; further, that in his mind "Cape Hatteras" is an integral, precise expres-

sion of his thought, and that his thought here and in "Indiana" and "Quaker Hill" is in harmony (resolved, blended) with "Proem" or "Atlantis" (or "The Tunnel" or "The River"). Whatever the chaos of his life, he considered his meditations within his craft had order and continuity.

I did not want to bring into my analysis of *The Bridge* in chapter Twelve supporting material from Crane's letters, essays, or other poems. One ought not to read a new poem armed with such material, and so I did not want to try to persuade a reader to my view of the poem except through an appeal to the poem's lines. The passages from the letters that I have quoted immediately above give only unnecessary evidence to what the poem itself demonstrates. But such material has served as the key—or capstone—for so much of the literature on Crane's poem that I think it admissable to use a bit of it now, if only to defend my view against it.

As for instance, this to Waldo Frank:

> Dear Waldo: I am not through working on it yet, but I thought you might care to see this last part of *The Bridge,* oddly enough emergent first . . .
>
> This section seems a little transcendental in tendency at present—but I think that the pediments of the other sections will show it not to have been
>
> January 18, 1926)

Crane does not wish "Atlantis" to strike one as "a little transcendental," not to speak of it as showing "intense mystical conviction." Crane consciously intends, that is, to play off the moments of a sense of integration against the moments of a sense of disintegration of other sections (since both moments are eternally part of the Process). This apparently conscious intent does not sit well with Horton's (and many others') terms of "faith" in "vision" which will last. Crane—while he hungers for the

Absolute, the Beautiful, the True—is not a Transcendentalist or Platonist or a believer in a Timeless Absolute outside of Time or Self, in an Other or Higher Reality or Supernaturalism. I find Crane's critical prose, as below, quite clear on all this (though the problem of common definition of terms has caused many people to find Crane's prose unclear and confused):

> It may not be possible to say that there is, strictly speaking, any "absolute" experience. But it seems evident that certain aesthetic experience (and this may for a time engross the total faculties of the spectator) can be called absolute, inasmuch as it approximates a formally convincing statement of a conception or apprehension of life that gains our unquestioning assent, and under the conditions of which our imagination is unable to suggest a further detail consistent with the design of the aesthetic whole.
>
> I have been called an "absolutist" in poetry, and if I am to welcome such a label it should be under the terms of the above definition.
>
> (Horton, "Appendix," p. 325)

This definition of "absolute" is quite different from that of a transcendental school of philosophy or mysticism. It refers to a self-sufficient aesthetic moment of an apprehension of life:

> . . . poetic prophecy in the case of the seer has nothing to do with factual prediction or with futurity. It is a peculiar type of perception, capable of apprehending some absolute and timeless concept of the imagination with astounding clarity and conviction.
>
> —"Modern Poetry" (*The Complete Poems of Hart Crane*, New York, 1958, Appendix B)

That is, (using "absolute" as Crane defines it) one believes in the imaginative moment of integration—the aesthetic whole—while in the moment. This is the "symbolist" or "contextual" idea of poetry. The symbolist poem is not dedicated to "The" truth but to "a" truth of its own making.

> Such a poem is at least a stab at a truth, and to such an extent may be differentiated from other kinds of poetry and called "absolute." Its evocation will not be toward decoration or amusement, but rather toward a state of consciousness, an "innocence" (Blake) or absolute beauty. (Horton, p. 326)

As the symbolist poem evokes in us a "state of consciousness" of an "absolute" beauty (everything in a self-sufficient harmonious order), so does a myth of a people give some order to their collective consciousness as a people:

> The name of Helen, for instance, has become an all-too-easily employed crutch for evocation whenever a poet felt a stitch in his side. The real evocation of this (to me) very real and absolute conception of beauty seemed to consist in a reconstruction in these modern terms of the basic emotional attitude toward beauty that the Greeks had. And in so doing I found that I was really building a bridge between so-called classic experience and many divergent realities of our seething, confused cosmos of today, which has no formulated mythology yet for classic poetic reference or for religious exploitation.[1] (Horton, p. 323)

This last sentence is clear concerning man's *need* for formulated mythology, for an "absolute" ("totally engrossing") conception of "beauty" (or the state of consciousness invoked by the order of an aesthetic whole). It is clear also concerning the poet's conscious building ("reconstruction") of myth (as the bridge) to satisfy these needs. The poet constructs symbolic myths *as if* they were real, to attain ("to exploit") the psychological state which is the only available substitute for religious desire. It is clear in the following passage that for Crane poetry is graceful, harmonious, not true (and no less necessary for it).

> Plato doesn't live today because of the intrinsic "truth" of his statements, their only living truth today consists in the "fact" of their harmonious relationship to each other. This grace is, or partakes of, poetry. (Horton, p. 343)

Grace, that is, with a small "g." Poetry, wrote Crane to Allen Tate, is not a "cure-all." Poetry as poetry should not "strain to sum up the universe in one impressive pellet." These are not the ideas of a committed transcendentalist or idealist. In the period of Crane's greatest activity on *The Bridge*, he wrote this to Waldo Frank:

> The symbols of reality necessary to articulate the span—may not exist where you expected them, however. By which I mean that however great their subjective significance to me is concerned—these forms, materials, dynamics are simply non-existent in the world. I may amuse and delight and flatter myself as much as I please—but I am only evading a recognition and playing Don Quixote in an immorally conscious way. (June 20, 1926)

A particularly modern dilemma: to stand up for poetry—as we must—when we are conscious of the poem as illusion. This is the theme of *The Bridge*; it is not a myth of America, but about myths and their necessity. Crane is in no pathological depression in this famous letter, but simply recognizing as he does everywhere in *The Bridge* that myths are not—no matter how much he would wish them to be—transcendent, truly visionary things. Crane's poems are about the dualistic experience. "The Darkness" he says concerning the poet, earlier in the letter, "is part of his business."

Brom Weber in a biography of Crane which appeared in 1948 clearly defines his ideas of mystics and their visions, but then, as I see it, wrongly refuses to apply his very relevant definition to Crane's attitudes:

> Mysticism is nothing more than the individual's direct apprehension of the aesthetic factors of reality (it is no accident that so many mystics are emotionally upwrought and see intense light) without the artist's ability to embody his apprehensions in form; it can discover no more and no less than nonmystical art. It cannot take the place of science and philosophy, and cannot achieve

> the universal truths for which the mystic traditionally strives. It is particular, sensuous, non-theoretical, aesthetic. In assigning himself a mystical poetic role, therefore, Crane was laboring under a lack of understanding of the nature of mysticism; this misunderstanding would not necessarily have harmed his poetry. He was decidedly on the wrong track, however, when he sought for eternal theoretic truths without the aid of scientific and philosophical knowledge and method. Here is where Crane's mysticism positively misled him. (p. 276)

I can accept Crane as a mystic in the terms of definition of Weber's opening sentence. Crane's statements above make clear his sense of "mysticism" as aesthetic apprehension. But that his poetry was dedicated to finding universal and eternal theoretic truths is, I have been at pains to show, not correct, though that supposition has been unfortunately the erroneous base from which most criticism of Crane, whether damning or praising or simply apologetic, has been written. I quote from Horton again (not to browbeat, but because his book is immensely beguiling and persuasive, the summation of the older, and the fountainhead for much of the newer, criticism):

> In falling short of the extreme goal he had set himself, in failing to achieve the complete and radiant vision of the mysticism he so vividly felt and so sadly misunderstood and abused, he seems to have done his spirit an irreparable injury from which it never recovered.... (Horton, p. 269)

> Irrevocably divorced from all the institutions of tradition and security, from family, marriage, and established religion—and in this he again symbolized the rootlessness of his age—he was at once possessed by the desire to discover an absolute faith and by an abhorrence of all rational discipline. In assimilating the life of his time with his enormous indiscriminate appetite for experience, he became too deeply entangled in its intellectual and spiritual confusions, as well as its vices, ever to be able to resolve this dilemma. Consequently his religious impulse was never definitively

> clarified. It appeared now as a form of pantheism, now as a Whitmanian vision of social utopia, "a pact, new bound, of living brotherhood," and again, more frequently, as a purely individual expression of subjective mysticism. Many of the critics of *The Bridge*, seizing upon this ambiguity and the dualism of spirit underlying it as the basic flaw of the work, the fault in the material that undermined the structure, characterized the poem as "a magnificent failure." (Horton, p. 314)

The mysticism Crane felt (the aesthetic experience he describes above) he well understood and articulated, and it did not have to do with "absolute faith" or pantheism, or social utopias or eternal truths. The dualism of *The Bridge* is its "apprehension of life," its context, not its flaw. These are the counter arguments this study must make to formulations such as Horton's about *The Bridge*.

But to be sure, talk of "absolutes" and "mysticism" and "beauty," "Gods" and "epics" and "eternity," which sprinkle Crane's letters and essays, is bound to be interpreted variously, and the interpretations bound to affect criticism of the poetry. And it must be admitted that often Crane's conversation and letters (though not the essays) postured as romantic-transcendental. There is finally only one road by which to escape the seductions of interpretation through biography, letters, history of ideas, philosophy, psychology, religion, sociology, etc. and that is to read only the poem till you feel you have caught its central attitudes, its tone.

The failure to do so is I think the primary fault of two early critics for whom Crane had great respect—Allen Tate and Yvor Winters. These two men knew Crane—perhaps too well for criticism—and were much caught up with their age and its literary and philosophic antecedents.

Tate's key terms in discussing Crane are "pantheism," "transcendentalism" and "romanticism." The three words do hang

together well, as the central vision of romanticism is of all things in the coherent universe implying a transcendent higher reality, which exists objectively outside the consciousness of the perceiver. But Crane does not see the universe (though he would like to) with the romantic's vision; his only absolute is the aesthetic wholeness (completeness) of the poem or myth in all its parts. Tate, it seems, is carrying on a battle with his age, and in his essay is using Crane's poem as a weapon against that age.

> . . . he asks of nature, perfection—requiring only of himself, intensity. The persistent, and persistently defeated, pursuit of a natural absolute places Crane at the center of his age.
>
> Alternately he asserts the symbol of the bridge and abandons it, because fundamentally he does not understand it. The idea of bridgeship is an elaborate blur leaving the inner structure of the poem confused.
>
> Yet some of the best poetry of our generation is in *The Bridge*. Its inner confusion is a phase of the inner cross-purposes of the time. Crane was one of those men whom every age seems to select as the spokesmen of its spiritual life; they give the age away. The accidental features of their lives, their place in life, their very heredity, seem to fit them for their role; even their vices contribute to their preparation. Crane's biographer will have to study the early influences of the rootless spiritual life of our time. The character formed by those influences represents an immense concentration, and becomes almost a symbol, of American life in this age.
>
> Crane's poetry has incalculable moral value; it reveals our defects in their extremity. I have said that he knew little of the history of his country. It was not merely a defect of education, but a defect, in the spiritual sense, of the modern mind.
>
> (Hart Crane in *The Man of Letters in the Modern World*, 1955, pp. 83-94)

I must counter with: the moment of intensity generated within the aesthetic experience of myth or poem is the absolute Crane pursues; the poem's point is that one cannot find truth in "na-

ture," in river, ocean, sky, or earth, but one can find intensity (totally engrossing, formally convincing) in the imagination's making myths of these. The bridge as a symbol for myth Crane perfectly understands; the confusion Tate finds in the poem and in the times is what is dramatized in but not exemplified *by* the poem. One need not I think counter the obvious red herring of Crane's lack of knowledge of American History. Tate's interests in the Crane essay are metacritical, sociological really.[2] He wishes to be a doctor to the age, pointing out the symptoms of malaise in modern times. He finds the infections in "romanticism," "narcissism," and, it appears later, in the lack of a rational religious belief.

Tate's classical temper leads him astray too I think in a strict categorizing of theme and genre of *The Bridge* which have little to do with the actual attitudes of the poem.

> With the instinct of genius he read the great poets, but he never acquired an objective mastery of any literature, or even of the history of his country—a defect of considerable interest in a poet whose most ambitious work is an American epic.
>
> In the great epic and philosophical works of the past, notably *The Divine Comedy*, the intellectual groundwork is simple philosophically; we know that the subject is personal salvation, just as we know that Crane's is the greatness of America. . . .

Crane's theme is *not* the greatness of America but the greatness of myth; he is not out to create the American epic but to use aspects of American myths to show how the myth-making imagination can create "apparitions" and "wraiths" that can sustain the hunger for "salvation." This is not to write a historical or literary epic in the sense of a genre with traditional recipes for action and diction, but to write with "epical" (large, broad) vision about the necessity and efficacy of myth for man and society. Tate finds the framework of the poem "fragmentary and often

unintelligible." It can but be so if one is looking for a transcendental epic in Tate's terms and finds instead *The Bridge*.

Yvor Winters uses Crane's poem to fight a battle against what he considers the philosophy of Emerson and Whitman. He equates the ideas of the three men and considers the philosophy—that everything in the universe is well and getting better—typical of American moral error. Speaking of the sequence called "Powhatan's Daughter" Winters says:

> We have here a characteristically Whitmanian variation on Emerson's pantheism: for Emerson God and the universe were one, but for Whitman the American soil was the part of the universe to be especially worshipped, so that the pantheistic mysticism tends to become a national mysticism.
>
> (*On Modern Poets*, 1959, pp. 120-144)

Pantheism, mysticism, the same inaccurate labels. Winters continues:

> I do not object to these poets' feeling a love for their country or for their region; but I believe that nothing save confusion can result from our mistaking the Mississippi Valley for God.

—which is not bad as wit but unconscionable in warping Crane's patent terror of the River to an adoration of it. Winters wishes to make Emerson, Whitman and Crane all worshippers in adoration of Process—

> . . . we see his glorification of change as change; we can find this elsewhere in Emerson; we can find it likewise in Whitman; it is one of the most important ideas of *The Bridge*.

*The Bridge* registers everywhere its resignation beyond despair in the face of change, of the cyclic process. What is counseled is "The patience that is armour and that shields/love from despair." Never is registered delight in all things or in the endless

flow of the ocean of things. To insist that Crane does so delight is then to be forced to insist, as Winters does, that Crane does not know what he is doing in sections like "The Tunnel"—

> But *The Tunnel* offers a kind of ugliness which is not justified by the Whitmanian theme and so cannot be treated in terms of the theme. It was an ugliness which Crane experienced, in part as a result of his acceptance of the theme and the fallacies of the theme, but to treat it in these terms he would have had to understand the fallacies and what had happened to him as a result of them. He did not understand, and the poem is an assortment of impressions without meaning. He abandons these particular impressions in the final poem, *Atlantis*, but a few years later they or others like them destroyed him.

and then having already postulated Crane's lack of understanding of his sense of despair contrary to his Emersonian optimism, Winters must insist on the meaninglessness of what affirmation there is in "Atlantis"

> In the last poem, *Atlantis*, the bridge is seen in apotheosis. The bridge is the United States of the future, reaching from ocean to ocean, from time to eternity; on it are spread cities and farmlands; from it skyscrapers rise to remoter and remoter distances, as the Whitmanian airplanes had risen earlier:
>
> Like hails, farewells—up planet-sequined heights
> Some trillion whispering hammers glimmer Tyre:
> Serenely, sharply up the long anvil cry
> Of inchling aeons silence rivets Troy
>
> The poem is unfortunately the most obscurely written in the sequence, if one examines it closely and from line to line; and I confess that I find it next to impossible to decipher except in what seem to me its most general intentions. As nearly as I can understand it, it offers a vision of physical splendor as a symbol for some kind of spiritual splendor; but the spiritual state in question re-

> mains undefined, and the final vision is without meaning: what we see ultimately is higher and higher skyscrapers, more and more marvelous in appearance, but ascending into heights of which the nature is uncertain.

The explication is lameness bordering on paralysis. The bridge as the "United States of the future" is purposely naive to make the poem look stupid. Skyscrapers are never mentioned or alluded to in "Atlantis." Winters' quotation from "Atlantis" has nothing to do with anything he says before or after the quotation. And most wonderfully for a critic pillorying a poet, Winters confesses and then demonstrates his inability to understand the lines or the section with any precision.

Then by way of summation of a quite non-critical essay, Winters adds:

> We have, it would seem, a poet of great genius, who ruined his life and his talent by living and writing as the two greatest religious teachers of our nation recommended.

And it is patent that Winters has really very little interest in *The Bridge* as an actual existing poem, but a consuming interest in attacking what he considers dangerous religious attitudes. Winters' argument in the essay runs: B's thought is identical to A's, C's thought is identical to B's, C committed suicide. Ergo, A's thought can only lead to suicide. I don't believe any of it, but it doesn't matter. There is the poem, suicide or no, Emerson or no. It keeps running coherent variations on a body of attitudes which have little to do with Emerson and which end always in a humanistic affirmation of man's imaginative shield in the face of a rolling universe. It is a self-sufficient piece of what Crane called "absolute beauty"—its truth is its harmony. It is inviolate to all the enemies to which presumably Hart Crane the man was not inviolate. Inviolability is what a poem was supposed to have in Hart Crane's symbolistic view. To attack a system of thought present in a literary work is metacriticism not criticism, and

metacriticism has its own validity. Of no validity is the attack on a poem through an attack on a system of thought which is not present in the poem. To so attack is the occupational weakness of the man engrossed in the history of ideas, especially the categorizer—as Mr. Winters is in the Crane essay—who likes to see the same set of ideas in as many unique works of art as possible.[3]

R. P. Blackmur was a critic usually most interested in sticking to the poem before him, to look closely at the new language of a new poem rather than to pluck out what conventional ideas he could find there. But Blackmur's essay on Crane does the poet less than justice, and it does so because Blackmur, like Winters, came to Crane's poetry with preconceptions about it. Blackmur introduces his essay in this way:

> These notes intend to examine certain characteristic passages of Hart Crane's poems as modes of language and to determine how and to what degree the effects intended were attained. The rationale is that of poetic language; the weapons are analysis and comparison. But there are other matters which must be taken up first before the language itself can be approached at all familiarly.
> (*Form and Value in Modern Poetry*, 1952, pp. 269-87)

It would have been better to say "to determine intention by the effects that are attained." More importantly, the phrase "other matters" Blackmur wishes to take up first has the ominous ring. He then prepares the reader to find sections of *The Bridge* "impenetrable" "ineluctable," and "confused" because a lyric poet of "agonized and tortured perception" so misunderstood himself as to attempt a "cultural epic." He will see in Crane's poetry the "unbalance of the assaulted, intoxicated sensibility" which he will contrast to the "final, no less exciting, clarity of the sane mirroring sensibility." In short Blackmur shares Tate and Winter's diagnosis of Crane's and the time's diseases—symptoms of romanticism as they define it. But Blackmur also has

great admiration for the strange life he finds in Crane's language. And so there is a very curious movement in each of Blackmur's analyses of lines from, say, "Wine Menagerie," or "Lachrymae Christi" or *The Bridge*. He articulates his delight and amazement at the control and understanding in a line here, then his sense of Crane's confusion in using words in a line there:

> Crane had a profound feeling for the hearts of words, and how they beat and cohabited, but here they overtopped him; the meanings in the words themselves are superior to the use to which he put them. The operation of selective cross-pollination not only failed but was not even rightly attempted. The language remains in the condition of that which it was intended to express: in the flux of intoxicated sense; whereas the language of the other lines of this poem here examined—is disintoxicated and candid. The point is that the quality of Crane's success is also the quality of his failure, and the distinction is perhaps by the hair of accident.

The whole feel of the passage is of unsureness in the critic. It is as if but a hair's breath of final understanding of intention would convince Blackmur that a word is beautifully right rather than symptomatically wrong.

> Similarly, again and again, both in important and in ornamental phrases, there are effects only half secured, words which are not the right words but only the nearest words. E.g.: "What eats the pattern with *ubiquity*. . . . Take this *sheaf* of dust upon your tongue . . . Preparing *penguin* flexions of the arms . . . [A tugboat] with one *galvanic* blare . . . I heard the *hush of lava wrestling* your arms." Etc. Not that the italicized words are wrong but that they fall short of the control and precision of impact necessary to vitalize them permanently.

The control and precision of impact happens, I have asserted above in analyses of similar diction, *if* the reader of *The Bridge* has sensed Crane's attitudes towards Dualism and Process. The ubiquitous eater and lava, the quiet wrestler, are both figurations

of Time, which is most memorably figured as the River. Time eats the "sheaf of dust," the poet's papers, the patterns he weaves, flow over man's civilizations and his myths. *Penguin* and *galvanic* I cannot believe fail in communicating their precise tone. The point is that so gifted a reader as Mr. Blackmur stops short of grasping the attitudes, the tone of Crane's poetry through his language because of preconceptions about the poem's author, or the poem's intentions, or its era.[4]

And there are many others who read either less carefully than Mr. Blackmur or with stronger preconceptions about one thing or another who attack the language and logic of parts or all of *The Bridge*, especially of "The Dance," "Cape Hatteras," and "Atlantis" sections, usually foisting their own confusion about the poem onto Crane:

> Much of the confusion and lack of precision in Crane's verse were due not to the use of these terms, [latinized, abstract, polysyllables and contemporary idioms] but to their combinations, or to their lack of precise reference in imagery. All the dangers to which Crane's language, sources, and style could lead him are exemplified in his own unconsciously cruel parody, "Cape Hatteras" in *The Bridge*.
>
> (Barbara Herman, "The Language of Hart Crane," *Sewanee Review* [1950] pp. 60-61)

> As in "Cape Hatteras," Crane's tendency towards etheral verbosity reaches a peak [in "Atlantis"] which strains the reader. Ideas hover on the verge of expression, then float away in a mist of inexactitude. (Brom Weber, *Hart Crane* [1948] p. 375)

By the time the poet has come to write the "Cape Hatteras" segment of his epic, he already knows the futility of the poem. It is not only the weakest link in *The Bridge;* its inspiration, a kind of hymn to Whitman, threatens to poison the whole work . . .

it is ["Cape Hatteras"] a piece of poorly conceived and poorly articulated work.

(Karl Shapiro, "The Meaning of the Discarded Poem," in *Poets at Work* [1948], pp. 112, 118)

. . . vague, confused and grandiose gesturings towards symbolism . . . The poem is a wordy chaos . . . having no glimpse or notion of any principle of order . . . rhythmic nullity . . . turgid verbosity . . . incoherence . . . the question is not, as one would gather from American criticism, At what point does Crane fall short? but, Why should he enjoy any reputation at all—as a poet, that is. At any rate, I cannot see that, apart from his conviction of genius and his confidence, he had any relevant gift.

(F. R. Leavis, "Hart Crane From This Side," *Scrutiny* [1939] pp. 443-446 passim)

The point [Crane's alleged misuse of the word "psychosis"] is not a minor one: such ignorance or confusion or both are everywhere in Crane except in his best poetry; and his ignorance has something to do with his failure in *The Bridge* to articulate a valid myth or even to create a poem with a coherent and sensible prose meaning. (Hyatt Waggoner, *The Heel of Elohim* [1950] p. 158)

Needless to say, this ["Cape Hatteras"] is the worst section of the rhapsody, the one where Crane's innate baroque style degenerates into noisy, opaque, strained externalities, worthy of third-rate futurists who think that to be modern means simply to enthrone Energy and Machine in rhetoric.

(Glauco Cambon, *The Inclusive Flame* [1963] pp. 155-6)

The list could be extended, and another easily prepared denigrating the "sentimentalism" of "Indiana." The technique common here and in Crane criticism generally is to attack there where one does not understand or is confused as to intention (though the intensity of Leavis' diatribe is unconscionable,

and the remarks of Mr. Cambon are surprising in an essay of much perception). Even if I have gained the assent of the reader in chapter Twelve of this essay to my articulation of my sense of the meaning of the various sections of *The Bridge* and of the precision of the language in the sections, it may still be disturbing to that reader that so many people can see the poem, in part or whole, as a failure. That people do seems to me a good lesson in the critical truths that 1) there is no such thing as "pure poetry," no possibility, that is, of completely separating poetic quality from meaning—lines that readers do not understand *will* seem wretched to them—and 2) that a grasp of the actual objective tone of a work, its central attitudes, is the prerequisite to all critical judgments, whether of coherence or quality. The latter, indeed, is the continuous theme of this book.

Barbara Herman's study of Crane's language is predicated on that transcendental Crane that seems to be near-archetypal in Crane criticism:

> Crane was an absolutist, who strove toward mystic vision; a pantheist who sought behind a chaotic world of appearances the reassurance of an absolute and permanent reality, and sought it naked, without conviction, without support.

The language of *The Bridge* must seem to exhibit "confusion" and a "lack of precision," as it does to Miss Herman if that language was intended to seek the things she would have it seek. Similarly with Brom Weber on the language of "Atlantis." I discussed above (p. 198) Weber on "mysticism"; his feeling that Crane "sought for eternal theoretic truths," must then make the tortured, conceited, ironic language of "Atlantis" and "Cape Hatteras" seem inexact and misty.

Karl Shapiro, much like Winters, presents a Crane poisoned by somebody else's ideas: "Walt Whitman presented him with the false vision of life which eventually Crane was to employ for his own self-destruction" (p. 111). The idea that Whitman's

ideas are destructive is metacritical, the idea that Crane is Whitman's disciple is, I have tried to demonstrate, wrong. One cannot judge poor articulation and conception if one is not correct about just what is being conceived and articulated. Crane is not articulating Whitman's "philosophy" as his own, but hailing Whitman as a fellow mythmaker. Shapiro, disliking (at that time) Whitman's vision, dislikes Crane's poem which he feels articulates that vision. And so it goes through most of the Crane criticism: false categories are fabricated, then torn down with the poet inside.

Leavis' invective in his short review can hardly be subjected to scrutiny because there is little analysis there. One gathers from the pastiche of quotes from *The Bridge* alternating with quotes from Waldo Frank's "Introduction" that Leavis is equating the ideas in Frank's prose with those in Crane's poem (as Shapiro with Whitman) and that he has an intense hatred for these. He quotes only from "Cape Hatteras," tells us it is bad stuff and demands our assent. The essay is mere bullying.

One must balance statements like Waggoner's above about Crane's failure "to create a poem with a coherent and sensible prose meaning" with later comments of his like this on "The Dance":

> The brave is perhaps God. But it is impossible for me to read this section with an assurance of understanding. Following a section, "The River," the last half of which seems to me one of the finest things in all modern poetry, this section strikes me as very obscure.

Waggoner, like others, feels that "Crane's was the search of a religious mystic." Therefore:

> . . . affirmation is only partially achieved. But that it is the chief intention is clear from the fact that the satire of such lines as those that precede and follow "Science—Commerce and the Holy-ghost" in "The River" strikes us as discordant. It is out of place because it denies what is intended to be affirmed.

That is, Crane's dualism was compulsive, uncontrolled, and damaging to the affirmative intent of the poem

> . . . in "The Tunnel," the skepticism is too final even for a plan which calls for alternations of mood. It reveals the preceding affirmations as rather wished for than achieved vision. Although it cannot cancel the moments of mystic intuition, it can destroy their value for the myth:

The position, well stated here, recurs over and over again in the Crane literature: affirmation thwarted by skepticism which crushes the poem's continuity of tone. I can only refer the reader back to chapter Twelve, to my persistent argument that Crane consciously dramatized dualistic experience and affirmed not *a* mystic vision but the imagination's mythmaking endlessly to satisfy our hunger for vision.

It seems to me, as I read Glauco Cambon's essay (which is so full of fine new insights into the recurrent imagery of *The Bridge* and the poem's place in twentieth century literature) and wonder why he accepts so many of the cliché judgments of the poem (especially of the verbal excesses of "Cape Hatteras," "Atlantis," and "Indiana"), that the reason is perhaps that underpinning his essay is the often-met-with assumption (as in Winters above) that the poem's intent is to create a myth of America.

> Crane wanted to be the rhapsodist of industrial America with its paradoxes of brutality, commercialism and creativity . . .
>
> Aesthetically speaking it ["Atlantis"] exhibits both his visionary power and his strained verbal excesses; the several reworkings, which Weber documents in the worksheet facsimiles appended to his monograph, did not quite manage to purify this language of accumulated paroxysm. It certainly speaks for Crane's commitment to his theme; he fought with all his strength to retain something comparable to Columbus' faith in the future of America in the face of harrowing doubts.

Aeroplanes, machines, Kitty Hawk, Whitman, Brooklyn Bridge, American artifacts hymned to as gods; it all seems a bit too "naive" to Cambon. But Cambon and so many others do not give Crane enough credit for conscious crafty manipulation of his materials (as is implied in Crane's calling his tramps in "The River" "psychological ponies"). *The Bridge* is not rhapsodizing the possibilities of future America, but of the mythic imagination. The image of Crane as romantic rhapsodist who fails to create the myth of America crowds out in Cambon the truer image of Crane as a sophisticated commentor on dualism and myth, including the myths of America.

There are many readers of Crane who feel, rather contrary to the readers above, that *The Bridge* is *not* a failure at all *and* is focused on some transcendental Truth or Absolute, whether Platonic, Neo-Platonic, Mystic, Christian, or other. I concur in the opinion that the poem is hardly a failure. I cannot agree that conceptions and apprehensions of a transcendental Ideal constitute the true central attitudes of the poem.

L. S. Dembo's important, groundbreaking book on *The Bridge* (*Hart Crane's Sanskrit Charge: A Study of the Bride*, 1960) begins with a few clearly stated assumptions—

> What he means, I think, is this: an Absolute exists that manifests itself in several forms; if these forms are "apprehended" by the poet through the imagination, which alone can bring on the special "state of consciousness," then they will reveal to him the nature of the Absolute itself.
>
> . . . the Bridge is neither a god nor a myth unto itself; rather it "lends a myth to God," or is the myth by which the Absolute makes itself understood in the modern world: it is the new embodiment of the Word—"Deity's young name"—just as in the "Ave Maria" section, Christ is the old embodiment of the Word to Columbus.

> . . . the Bridge is God's Word in His communication with modern man. The inviolate curve of the gull ends in the gull's disappearance high over the bay, but the Bridge will "Unto us lowliest" descend and, in doing so, will "lend a myth to God," a form by which He can manifest Himself in the twentieth century.

Dembo is saying that Crane believes a God or Absolute exists (objectively, outside of our own subjective natures) whom the poet can apprehend by forms of beauty like the bridge. The real world, this world, is harsh and purposely dramatized in all its harshness because it is God's will that we apprehend Him through suffering and tragedy:

> By "the acceptance of tragedy," Crane meant a willingness to believe in what Nietzsche called the eternal life that "exists beyond all phenomena, and in spite of all annihilation." Simply put, Crane accepted the proposition that resurrection always follows suffering and death.

> . . . the poet's main concern is to preserve his faith while living in a world that seems to deny the Ideal. He is able to do so by means of the tragic argument, that the Absolute lies beyond pain and suffering, that divine harmony lies beyond moral chaos.

One can see such a "faith that transcends despair" in *The Bridge* only if one consistently takes literally the language of religious transcendence (as "Deity" and "Word"), language which in my view is used half wistfully, half tragically to refer to the necessary solace in myth-making only. To speak of God's "manifesting" himself as Bridge is to loosen Crane's tension. The poem spends so very little time with the hunger for (faith in) "God" or the "Absolute," so very much on the mythologizing of reality. What is secondary in the poem is made primary in Dembo.

I think Dembo is much closer to the true tone of *The Bridge* in an aside:

> In the constant questioning of faith that the narrator must endure throughout the last sections, there is a vague suggestion of Nietzsche's theory of "eternal recurrence" (that the hero or superman must realize that all his struggles will be in vain and that, in an endless series of lives, he will have to endure them again and again).

The "vague suggestion"—with respect to myth rather than hero—is I feel everywhere in the poem (minus the "endless series of lives" idea). And in fact it seems that this "vague suggestion" has grown in importance for Dembo. In his latest essay on *The Bridge* (in his *Conceptions of Reality in Modern American Poetry*, 1966) it seems that he has shifted his emphasis concerning the attitudes of the poem from philosophic ("Nietzschean") and theological ("faith") to aesthetic ("illusion"):

> The Nietzschean rationale notwithstanding, Crane's uncertainty about the metaphysical legitimacy of this response was recurrent, and what eludes the reader as well as it eluded Crane himself is the exact nature of the poetic experience in his universe. Is the poet actually a pantheist who feels himself able to reach a mystical state by surrendering to a reality in which ugliness and pain are mere appearances; or is he actually a nihilist who self-consciously induces in himself a narcotic state in which no ugliness and pain are perceivable, a state which he knows, ultimately, is only an illusion? While Crane wanted to believe that he was practicing the former, he was sophisticated enough to fear that he was practicing the latter.
>
> . . . Thus despite the coherence lent to the work by the Nietzschean argument, there is, in a sense, nothing but the literary principle of anticlimax to prevent another cycle of despair and ecstasy from being added to the poem and extended indefinitely.

This is all very close to my sense of the dualistic tone of the poem except that I do not think that what Crane wanted to say eluded or deluded him. He *was* sophisticated and he was also not so

romantic or agonized as to see aesthetic illusion as mere narcotic. One senses a slight tone of pique in these passages in Dembo that Crane is not perhaps as Nietzschean, romantic or transcendental as he once supposed him to be.

Heavily platonic (and very close to Dembo's earlier position) is J. Arpad's sense of tone of *The Bridge* as

> . . . the poet's affirmation of how a vision of the bridge's absolute form or idea (though as "obscure as that heaven of the Jews") may assist man in enduring his fate, may lead him eventually to see the ultimate reality . . . the bridge "lends a myth to God"—myth, not in the sense of story, but as *logos*, the philosophic Word. In Christian terms, the Word has been identified with Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Church, and the Gospel; in all instances, the Word has been both a vision of God and an intermediary means of attaining a vision of God. In Crane's terms, the Brooklyn Bridge had been given this function in the modern world. ("Hart Crane's Platonic Myth" *American Literature*, 1967, p. 85)

It is a short jump from this sort of articulation to an even closer identification of Bridge with Diety.

> Whether consciously or not, Crane presents his Bridge as a concretization of God considered in terms of the Incarnation—an idea at least as old as the thirteenth century when Saint Catherine of Siena used it as the focal symbol in her Dialogues.
>
> It would hardly strain this definition to consider Cathay as Crane here employs it as a synonym for salvation.
>
> (Sister M. B. Quinn, *The Metamorphic Tradition in Modern Poetry*, 1966, pp. 146, 166)

The technique of criticism in criticism platonically oriented, as in these passages, is one of identification by analogy. Images and terms also found in Plato make Crane a Platonist; Light, Bridge, Snake are part of Christian iconography, so *The Bridge* can be explicated in terms of Christian dialectics. Sister Bernetta Quinn,

like Glauco Gambon, is very perceptive very often on *The Bridge*, but to see the poem as primarily about God and Salvation (or Arpad's "Higher Reality") is to blur the poet's sense of the end of all searches in the minimal salvation of the imagination ("I *wanted* you," Crane says to the "Nameless Woman of the South"; the search is past). Sister Quinn's approach or any approach which finds Crane's focus is on Absolutes, whether Christian, Platonic or mother, cannot help submerging the sense of dualism and Process which the poem embodies. The "eternity" of the River's destruction of all men and all myths, for instance, is typically transformed in these approaches into the eternity of salvation:

> The river flows over "De Soto's bones." But what the poet is really saying is that we are all implicated in this flow of nights and days, and only with patience will we reach the "biding place." In the final stanza the poet identifies the "biding place" as eternity. The metaphor is thus complete. The Mississippi of time flows forever into the "stinging sea" of the gulf of eternity. Having followed the time-and-eternity theme to its conclusion, the poet ends "The River," as he ended the "Ave Maria," on a note of praise, reverence, and resignation.
>
> (Samuel Hazo, *Hart Crane*, 1963, p. 89)

Resignation yes, praise and reverence for the River, hardly.[5]

Stanley Coffman ("Symbolism in The Bridge", *PMLA*, vol. 65, 1951) runs an imagery analysis of the sort Miss Spurgeon first made popular with Shakespeare. The method is laudable in that it looks at an aspect of a poem itself, but Coffman defines and then demonstrates the limitations of the method in probing for the precise body of attitudes the poem embraces:

> There are, of course, dangers in the approach that I have used. It tends to isolate the symbol, whereas Crane in most cases works his symbolic pattern carefully into the texture of the separate sections. It does not measure the extent to which his effort in this direction falls short of success; where his interest in a passage

> wavers, the effectiveness of the Bridge imagery wavers. Yet it does reinforce the accepted criticism of the poem, showing, particularly in his use of images of whiteness more than a hint of undesirable ambiguity, an uneasy juxtaposition of Whitman's "light" and Melville's "white"; and, at the same time, in the imagery of fire in its various forms the concept which he apparently depended upon to resolve this contradictory view of the transcendental real.

"Undesirable ambiguity" and the "transcendental real." These *are* the accepted criticism of the poem to explain both the poem and its failure. Ambiguity can admirably dramatize dualistic attitudes and experiences; it is inadmissable in dramatizing really transcendental experience. Coffman is squarely in the transcendental camp of interpreters (as those immediately above) of *The Bridge*:

> The effort of *The Bridge* is to express the conquest of space and time, which is accomplished symbolically in "The Dance," and show the common source of the two kinds of light, a sanctified white and earthly red, to go beyond the materialistic half-truth of the hoboes who simply attribute change and destruction to "fire and snow."
>
> Love is passion, the light of fire, and mortal; but it is God-given and though it brings agony, it is also the way to God and a white light without the ambiguous dross of mortality.

The images of light and fire are seen then in a transcendental context which, I have maintained, is not the true context of *The Bridge's* attitudes. Imagery analysis, that is, is no scientific instrument, it cannot substitute for a precise response to the central attitudes of a poem.

Alan Trachtenberg, in a fascinating book *Brooklyn Bridge* (1965), has a chapter on Hart Crane's poem, where the approach to *The Bridge* is platonistic and runs something like this: The Bridge is a " 'paradigm' of love and beauty, of the eternal ideas which lie behind and inform human experience." To apprehend

the ideas is to be transported in one's consciousness to a higher reality—while not denying the chaotic reality we live in (called "History"). The transcendental experience is archetypical and a true myth follows the contours of the archetype:

> Thus in no sense of the word is *The Bridge* a historical poem. Its mode is myth. Its aim is to overcome history, to abolish time and the autonomy of events, and to show that all meaningful events partake of an archetype: the quest for a new world

Again, as with Dembo, it is wrong to postulate (it will warp one's reading of the poem sooner or later) that Crane had any real faith in, has expressed more than the human hunger for, Absolutes and Ideas. If I have penetrated Trachtenberg's language it seems however that he sees Crane as a true Platonist—that is, he finds Crane believing in some sort of Absolute beyond that of aesthetic unity.

> . . . Thus the poet recognized that all of history culminated in self-discovery; and he would lead the race out of its bondage in time and space to that moment of consciousness in which all would seem one. That moment of "return" would redeem history by abolishing it.

The quality of the poem for Trachtenberg (and this is the twist of the usual platonic position) is in the tension Crane maintains between his sense of chaotic reality (the city, "History") and his faith in the higher reality symbolized by the bridge. He feels that the last six stanzas of "Atlantis" mar the poem as they float away into an inevitably unconvincing dramatization of the higher reality, leaving the harsh actuality (fact, "History") behind:

> The dissolution of the bridge as fact—and the subsequent drop in the poem's intensity was perhaps an inevitable outcome of the poet's conflict between his faith and reality.

The last six stanzas are however full of tension, full of the language of Platonic transcendentalism interwoven with the most precise qualifiers to point the vision of myth as the closest man comes to satisfying his hunger for Absolutes (see the analysis p. 185). Trachtenberg's Platonic stance finally forces him to the same wall (though by a different route) Coffman was up against: for the Platonist, ambiguity of attitude cannot co-exist with "Faith" in idealism. Trachtenberg's essay is very subtle (and evasive) but it is based really on a simple twisting of the recurring criticism of *The Bridge:* that is, that conflict in Crane between his "faith" and his "skepticism" finally mars the poem.

Within a certain brand of "mysticism," the ambiguities in experience cannot mar one's faith but are in fact its cornerstone. The position can be called "exultant dualism"; it embraces what Yvor Winters damns as the "glorification of change as change." This metacritical position impels Bernice Slotes' approach to *The Bridge.* She, like so many others, identifies the thought of Whitman (as she sees it) with the thought of Crane. I will let the position speak for itself in some fairly lengthy quotes:

> These "positive and universal tendencies" are the currents of the larger tradition to which both poets belonged—the affirmation of a spiritualized cosmic union in which opposites are paradoxically identified: body and spirit, past and present, good and evil. The parabolas of mystic evolution, the encirclement of all experience as necessary to the generation of a spiritual force, the movement of consciousness which in its very kinetic poise also unites man and the cosmos—these central conceptions in Whitman's poetry help to explain the mystical curve of unity which informs the structure of Crane's Bridge
>
> The concept of the whole, of unified duality, is dramatized in another way by the act of the curve whose lines go in continuous upward and downward movements—or which fall from high, and out of descent create another rising force. These are patterns of

the journey of the soul in its struggle with the unwieldy, unequal, and fragmentary forms of mortal experience that must be reconciled before the final vision is attained. Both the lines of Crane's physical bridge and the movement of the imaginative action in the poetic bridge turn to the same thematic key: that the whole form can exist only *because* it has joined division, diversity, and motion; and that such an identity has a living dimension which can touch an infinite spiritual power

In "Cape Hatteras" the physical terms of air-flight and destruction prepare for the spiritual ascensions. For it is only out of the total experience of both high and low that the final ascending "passage" is made possible. This is the journey of the soul to the mystic end, as it goes through the flesh, the evil, and the death which are the necessary parts of mortality. To think of the structure of "Cape Hatteras" as showing, first, the human condition; second, the human failure; and third, the rise to infinity through the way set down by Whitman, will give it a consistent form.

In the mechanical, material world of "The Tunnel," the protagonist again goes through hell in order to reach paradise

(*Start with the Sun* [1960])

This is Miss Slote's explanation of the Process—evil, change, death exist *in order that* we may reach a mystic paradise (the end of "Atlantis" is the paradisical "final vision"). The "central conceptions" might seem to the skeptical eye to be merely 1) the ordering of unity from duality by author's *fiat*, 2) a demand for assent to the (mystic?) law that what goes down must come up.

I do not want to argue metacritically here the exultant dualism position. It does seem to me to pretend to be handling the dualistic condition while really only exulting in the describing it. What is critically pertinent only is whether the position articulates accurately the attitudes of *The Bridge*.

In the paragraphs from the Slote essay we have a devotee's sureness about the mystic way, almost an eagerness to fall with

the airplane or to descend into the Tunnel because it is the way to rise to infinity. But the end of "Atlantis" is not a "final vision." I find no such sureness, mystic confidence, or faith in Crane concerning a mystic end, only an acceptance of tragic dualism, a hunger for Absolutes, and a humanistic affirmation of man's capacity for endurance through his imagination. The attitude of cosmic confidence is not the effect of *The Bridge*'s tortured and sophisticated diction. Miss Slote's "mystic curves" warp much in the poem besides its ending. We have for instance Mary in "Virginia" and the sailor in "Cutty Sark" apotheosized in Miss Slote, since they represent for her the upward swing of the dialectic arc:

> Finally, out of reality and over the spring flowers in the street scene, she is shown leaning out of the tower, like a medieval painting or an image of the golden-haired Blessed Damozel at the gold bar of heaven. Described through love and beauty, she is given a clear spirituality: "Cathedral Mary,/shine!" In "Three Songs," woman rises from Eve in the dark waters, to Magdalene in the dance hall, to Mary shining high in the flowers.
>
> . . . the white mother of "Indiana" takes on the nature symbolism of Pocahontas, and the son continues to sea in man's perpetual search.

One presumably should not cavil that the situation of the real Mary in the poem is not blessed nor is the Sailor searching anymore in "Cutty Sark," for that would be to bend a curve.[6] The laying-on of pre-cut archetypal patterns is all important in this sort of metacriticism. The overriding metacritical concern is why it never gets down to the business of criticism, which is the precise response to the actual tone of the unique, individual poem.

Miss Slote's approach to Crane is by way of mythic paradigms or archetypes illuminating the "cosmic consciousness." Deena Metzger's approach ("Hart Crane's *Bridge*: The Myth Active" *Arizona Quarterly*, vol. 20, 1964) follows a metacritical line even

more popular in our critical decade, myths as illuminating the "unconscious" of a culture.

> Hart Crane as mythmaker was not a seer but a divine. He struck his rod of poetry upon the soil of America and found its essence. His conscious mind was the unconscious of our culture and his dream promised the fulfillment of our memory. He did not create, he remembered
>
> Crane's final poetic statement is an affirmation of his exalted belief in the dream of America and his faith that the latent tendencies prophesied in myth will reassert themselves

The myths are the two aforementioned (chapter Twelve, footnote 2) Central American myths of Plumed Serpent and White Indian God who return. In Metzger's view the symbolic (prophetic?) implications of these culture myths are that America will attain its "Messianic destiny" when it finally fuses its Indian and European consciousness into one national consciousness:

> Crane incorporated these myths symbolically as the underlying theme of *The Bridge.*
>
> The poet has successfully sought and fused with the Indian maiden, and thus it is possible that again there might be the fusion of the white man and the Indian. The unification of the diverse elements, symbolized through that perfect conjunction of the two images of the serpent and the eagle in the plumed serpent, is a prayer that this state of being shall exist again and instigate the true spiritual civilization of the "new world"

The approach is reductive in limiting the Eagle and Serpent images to representing "European" and "Indian" cultural tendencies (rather than Space and Time—the enemies of man's imagination) and the meaning of *The Bridge* to the (supposed) meaning of the Quetzalcoatl and Tenochititlan myths. *The Bridge* is so much more than a tract on America, its past and future, its national memory or its dream. But I find myself saying this over

and over. It is as Meyer Abrams has said in a passage I quoted earlier (chap. 10), ". . . if A is in some respects like B, then A is identifiable as B. This appears to be the standard formula of archetypal reasoning."

Miss Metzger's approach (via Jungian archetypes) is based on assumptions concerning the existence of a collective unconscious, Miss Slote's and Mr. Kloucek's (via mystic archetypes) on the existence of a cosmic consciousness. The critical question is of course only whether Crane's poem embodies such assumptions of "myth-criticism." Other approaches to *The Bridge* are based on assumptions (much more widely held) concerning the existence of an individual unconscious which (in Crane's case, if not always), opposes and often conquers a poet's conscious intentions. Such psychological approaches must be judged as criticism just as all the other supposed "critical" approaches (metacritical really), the biographical, philosophical, historical, categorical, sociological, etc. The judgment must be based on whether the articulation squares with the objectively existing tone—or body of attitudes—of the poem as it exhibits itself in the careful reading of the poem.

Mr. Paul Friedman, in an essay on the symbolism of bridges in dreams (*"The Bridge,* a Study in Symbolism," *Psychoanalytic Review,* Vol. 21 1952), summarizes by way of introduction a psychoanalyst's conclusions on the matter: The bridge represents in dreams 1) the "male member" 2) the vehicle between the condition of the Unborn and Life 3) the vehicle between the condition of Life and Death 4) change of condition in general. But as we go further in the essay it is apparent that only the first category (of a rather useless quartet) is going to really matter to the psychoanalytic critic of *The Bridge*:

> Whether the dreamer be a woman who has not yet accepted her femininity, or a man with a deep castration anxiety, the inability to cross the bridge may in either case represent the incapacity for heterosexual intercourse.

That is, Crane's poetry is really about Crane's homosexuality

> The poem continues: "But some are twisted with the love/of things irreconcilable,—/The slant moon with the slanting hill." Crane was racked by this "love of things irreconcilable": the incestuous love of the mother, and the sterile love of man for man.

And about the consequent guilt and frustration leading to his death and suicide:

> For the obsession of the poem, in spite of Crane's conscious intentions and in spite of the symbol of the bridge itself, is not with love but with *death*.

I doubt that Mr. Friedman would have been able to find these things—homosexuality, guilt, death wish—in *The Bridge* without recourse to Crane's biography and letters. But more importantly I must strongly insist that the poem does *not* embody the "conscious intentions" that Friedman (and others) feels are unconsciously thwarted by Crane's neuroses:

> It is . . . a striking example of a work of a creative imagination which thwarts the intentions of its author. Crane intended the bridge to stand as a multiple symbol denoting the union of finite and infinite, matter and spirit, physical and spiritual love (Eros and agape), past and present, being and becoming.

If these are not the intentions of *The Bridge* (and they are not) the work may not be thwarting its author. Friedman's thesis is that the tortured homosexual has hopelessly romantic sublimational urgings toward mystic unions which cannot hide his real obsessions: *The Bridge* is a case study in failure of man and poet. The position so far as criticism is concerned is little different from the chronic diagnosis of failure in *The Bridge* stemming from Crane's unresolved, uncontrollable dualism of vision, the irreconcilability of Desire and Despair. The positions stem from a reading of Crane's biography not his poem. It has been the burden of this study that the manic-depressive, idealist-nihilist so

easily constructed of Crane is not the poet that emerges from *The Bridge*. The Crane quite in control of what he is doing, and speaking not of personal mystic needs for cosmic unions, or of personal trauma, but of man's everpresent need for mythologies or aesthetic moments which temporarily unite irreconcilables (like Love and Death), this Crane does not appear often in the biographies or in much of the literature on *The Bridge*. And yet that Crane sets the poem's tone, focuses every line and word in a unique diction and style to that intent. That this is true should not really be difficult to accept. One has only to understand I think the "obsessions" of a wrought pattern, whether the pattern of a scientific or mathematic inquiry or the pattern of a dance, or the following out of an idea, to understand how *The Bridge* can be controlled by a powerful modern idea—that of the consolations of illusions—rather than by Crane's problems. One cannot know, say, Leonardo's alleged homosexuality through his head of Saint Anne.[7]

One might think Brewster Gheselin's view of *The Bridge* but one more "darkness kills the affirmation" analysis of failure, couched in psychological terminology (the unconscious vs. the conscious):

> In his conscious intention, Crane did not commit his protagonist to the adventure into darkness. Yet the encounter with the chaos of the sea is the most compelling theme of *The Bridge*: not the consciously accepted theme of order established, but the theme of order destroyed. It elicits Crane's profoundest excitement and sustains his greatest poetry.
>
> . . . Crane's failure to develop his understanding of the sea and to submit his concept of the Bridge to the revisions which would have been forced by completed understanding, seems to me to account for the major imperfections of *The Bridge* and for the swift disintegration of the man
>
> (*Partisan Review*, Vol. 16, 1949)

Again we have the work as the man, and the man's work out of his conscious control. The difference of the Gheselin essay from the Type is that he sees the darkness as healthy:

> Whether in art or thought, a disordering, or a suspension of order, precedes the attainment of fresh insight. Crane's impulse toward the waters is thus understandable as essentially right and normal. It is part of his human need as a creative individual.
>
> There is a great difference between one who floats but who has never entirely entrusted himself to the water and one who floats but has given himself to it. The latter has risen from death. The former is delaying death, and his reprieve is his defeat.

Gheselin's essay is controlled by a theory of the psychology of the creative imagination. The symbolism in this psychological theory interestingly inverts Friedman's symbolism. The bridge is no life-giving phallus here but a representation of the deadening established way; the sea is a bath of renewal:

> The Beloved Bridge, his ship, became a prison, because he would not allow it to carry him into the darkness of the unlimited sea.
>
> Crane's reluctance to indulge his impulse toward the water appears to have been determined not only by deathly fear but by an excessive attachment to the established order. The explanation may lie in the fact of his sexual inversion.

One must pick what set of conflicting symbols one wishes to use to demonstrate it, or one might reconcile them by the recourse of Sea as Womb, but no matter, the psychological critic will seek a homosexual poet's homosexuality in his poem.

Mr. Gheselin's essay is perverse in the sense that it completely disregards the difference between the physical death of a poet by water (as of all things in the River) and the spiritual rebirth a poet supposedly feels by a creative encounter with the dark waters of disorder. The poem's waters deal primarily, one should admit, with the former, whatever one may think of the theory about

the latter. Gheselin is treating not of what the poem says but what it doesn't say or should have said. What the poem says has consistency and continuity, and so Gheselin's strictures are not *critically* relevant. They might have been if the poem were as discontinuous as Gheselin feels it is. Psychological criticism is usually critically relevant only in explaining reasons for failure.

Mr. Roy Harvey Pearce argues with much more cogency than some of the critics above an approach to *The Bridge* which finally ends in a position perhaps as extreme. If I follow Mr. Pearce's rather involved prose, it seems that he would have Crane adoring language for its "magical" power to convey poet and sensitive reader to new aesthetic experiences—though I am not quite sure whether Pearce feels that *Crane* feels these experiences are purely aesthetic or a possible contact with some sort of objective Divinity or Force which "charges" reality and endows language with "agency."

> For Crane's is essentially a poem celebrating man's gift to use language thus—one offering sacrifice and propitiation to whatever in man makes that use possible. The power of human agency is imputed to things which don't actually have them. But don't they really? Crane is asking. Isn't the whole of reality charged with the power of agency. And isn't it the peculiar burden of language to reveal that power to us—that power which will prove to be ours, since it is our language. Man, through language, is maker and master of all he surveys, including himself. The God whom Crane repeatedly addressed is the force for godliness of which, as he can analyze it in language, he can partake. Or rather: he can learn that he has always partaken of it, that he has been that precipitating, creating agent without which godliness could not find its voice and its vehicle.
>
> (*The Continuity of American Poetry* [1961])

There is a tendency in the rhetoric of the passage to make Crane far too much a devotee of language itself. *The Bridge* is not ador-

ing the magical agency of words but the indomitable spirit of man which will have myths—stories which give explanations of being, purpose and relation—to orient themselves in a universe in which they seem patently not masters. To say that Crane adores words (language, the medium,) rather than the import of words on the reader's psychology is to have him prefer the building blocks to the house. Man has occupied many houses and *The Bridge* celebrates man's impulse to build, not for the block but for the house. Pearce it seems would have it otherwise:

> Crane's obsessive use of the word "myth" is, I think, unjustified, since for him there is no essential "story" behind reality which, as it is revealed to him, will let him design rituals whereby he might celebrate the revelation . . . Crane's "myth" is simply his word for that fecundative power of language, its particular *mana*, in which he would find its primary mode of being. For Crane there can be only one "myth," that of creation; and even this is hardly "mythic" as we have traditionally understood the word—since creation is for him in the end not an event but a force, an agency without any recognizable agent except him through whom particular instances of creation work . . . The "myth" is, then, solipsistic—that of man the myth-maker who must feed upon the myth he makes. Our gaze is fixed hypnotically on the Prodigal-protagonist, willing himself to do his will.

Pearce is here I think quite penetrating but yet forcing an unnecessary position. Myth as a story representing a belief is one definition, myth as a story representing a need or wish is another. For Crane there are innumerable myths that satisfy man's need for order, that give him joy though they are fictions. *The Bridge* is not one of these myths, but it is about man's consolations in the myths he makes to satisfy his need for Absolutes. This idea of illusion as value I find at the center of Crane's attitudes in *The Bridge*, rather than any solipsistic love of language.

The distinctions between my position and Pearce's seem to me important ones to make. Pearce's sense of Crane's attitude to-

ward language forces one to consider Crane a gifted zealot about language rather than a poet with a gift for "centrality," by which I mean a humanism that could speak to a wide audience.

> Actually, he had just discovered the fact that making poems involves making linguistic innovations, and was totally unprepared for this discovery. Undisciplined as he was, impatient, possessed of a linguistic sensibility so powerful that it often evaporated his intelligence, he confused innovation with revolution.

There is praise here but also condescension, which is all right unless it has happened, as it has happened with other critics of Crane, that the critic's confusion as to purpose and tone of passages in Crane's language has led him to attack the intelligence and discipline of the poet.[8]

Pearce's article, then, I consider a brilliant overstatement of real insight. There are several other articles on *The Bridge* which, whether only in passing or in their whole approach, articulate a sense of the tone of the poem close to that which I have been trying to persuade the reader. These critiques which I want now to discuss seem to me to grasp the central attitudes of Crane's poem, but then to either doubt or fail to see (or see completely) the continuity of these attitudes in the poem. My analysis of *The Bridge* in Chapter One argued for its thoroughgoing continuity of tone, its confidence, its stability, its lack of confusion. It is right, then, that the last task of this chapter should be to argue with the critics below in seeking some final precision of statement concerning the continuity of *The Bridge*.

Frederick J. Hoffman (in a chapter in his book, *The Twenties*, 1955) makes some acute remarks in passing concerning the attitudes in the poem

> "Lie to us" [in "The Dance"] is an appeal to the efficacy of the ritual chant and formal dance, whose objective is to sustain myth against the ravages of fact . . . This is not a rational endorsement

of faith, but a participation in ritual for an objective defined by symbolism created within the myth.

It ["Atlantis"] is therefore the culmination of Crane's search for a secular myth, not dependent upon past dogmas but "intrinsic," containing its certainties and its symbology within itself.

Hoffman has looked at the lines from "The Dance" and "Atlantis," has sensed the complex attitudes there and the possible implications. However his essay demonstrates that he has not felt that these implications pervade the poem, or that the tone of secular sophistication is continuous in the poem.

It ["Cape Hatteras"] is crucial to the sequence, and it is full of frantic images and rhythms. It fails because Crane could not control its mass of perceptions. . . .

No one can miss noting the strenuousness of this language, its frantic jumbling of past with present, and most of all the stridency of its appeal—as though Crane were saying, "You [Whitman] were responsible for this in the first place; I *must* believe you and it if I am to be saved."

Belief and Salvation—words that create the tortured mystic, the frantically transcendental Crane representative of his age. Hoffman is taking the old line, one quite inconsistent with the Crane above who can say "Lie to us." Frantic, strident, jumbled, uncontrolled: these are the oft-met-with inaccurate labels for the substance and diction of "Cape Hatteras." So are these remarks inaccurate about the man and his motives:

He was motivated first of all by an oversimplified view of what Eliot and his followers were actually doing; it was based on a simple emotional division of the motives for writing about the contemporary world (as either blandly optimistic or frankly pessimistic). Crane was not acquainted with any orderly or systematic body of knowledge through which he could translate his convictions into art; most of all, such a body of knowledge was not avail-

able (except at considerable expense of contemporary interests, in the universities) to him as he prepared to write his "great affirmation."

Oversimplified, disorderly, ignorant. . . . I have done my best to discourage these epithets in the preceding essay. One wonders on Hoffman's own terms what is oversimplified, or blandly optimistic or unsophisticated about "a participation in ritual for an objective defined by symbolism created within the myth," as one sees that the objective is the desire for order, for sustenance against the ravages of fact.

M. L. Rosenthal in his *The Modern Poets* (1965) presents a fine reading of the "Proem" in which he sees clearly that the dualism in the poem is consciously, intentionally there.

> This ultimate unsureness of faith in *The Bridge* is often called a 'failure' of the poem also . . . If the sequence has failed, it is because the fifteen poems that make it up are somewhat uneven in quality and not because *The Bridge* expresses the agonized duality of the human condition (what Lawrence would call its 'crucified' condition) so honestly. Though Crane could not achieve absolute faith in the vision, he never doubted its beauty or its meaning. His real triumph lay in registering the complex state of feeling in which neither total confidence nor total despair allows the other mastery.
>
> "Atlantis," the paradisally ecstatic paean which closes *The Bridge*, does not, of course, overcome the dark conviction of "The Tunnel." It strains against it, but together the poems proliferate and sustain the duality of spirit established in "Proem."

I cannot quite understand Rosenthal when he says that "Though Crane could not achieve absolute faith in the vision, he never doubted its beauty or its meaning." The first clause seems inconsistent with the second and both evasive of the primary attitudes of the poem. To read *The Bridge* in terms of struggle for

vision rather than controlled meditation on myth is for instance to read "Atlantis" as Rosenthal does as a purely affirmative statement (intended to counter the "Tunnel" section) and to miss the effects of its precisely qualified diction. The language of "Atlantis" and *The Bridge* in general speaks of myths that can console, not absolutes in which one is struggling to have faith. But to see that the dualism in the poem is not a fault of the poem, but what it is about, that it is in places, at least, triumphantly done, is to go a long way towards reevaluating a poem that had so often been called a failure *or* a success for the wrong reasons.

Gordon Grigsby admirably summarizes (in his brief article in *College English*, vol. 24, 1963) the critical imprecisions of much of the literature on Crane:

> In one breath Crane is charged with a mindless optimism or idealism; in the next he is charged with including ugly realities and negations that conflict with this idealism and "confuse" the poem.
>
> A more consistent and, I believe, more accurate view will recognize that *the ugly realities are intended.* The tortured awareness of realistic circumstance is an *integral part of the vision.* . . . its ironic juxtapositionings are fully intended . . .
>
> . . . the poem does not eulogize either past or present; both have their crimes and "The Tunnel" is a fierce recognition of the demonic elements in contemporary industrial America. Neither does it eulogize the future of America as a nation; it affirms potential human ideals and, hesitatingly, catches the "antiphonal whispers" of Idealism.

All that is missing from Grigsby's précis of the central attitudes of the poem is the sense of Crane's awareness that the closest man comes in reality to his idealistic visions is in the transient realms of the imagination, realms which defy but are part of the Process. The poem's continuity of attitude is not in the poet's attitudes towards Idealism, but towards man's myth-making.

Grigsby's essay does not analyze the sections of *The Bridge* but is a precise (though incomplete) articulation of the tone, the attitudes, of the whole. It is, like Rosenthal's essay, a fine ground-clearing operation.

Thomas Vogler in his article "New View of *The Bridge*" (*Sewanee Review*, vol. 73, 1965), articulates something very much like the true tone of the poem as he discusses "The Tunnel":

> The "Word that will not die," even though every particular embodiment of the vision the poet finds must die, is the vision of his continually reborn desire to find a vision. For an instant he is able to see himself as Sisyphus, and to accept that vision, because his hands can "drop memory" of his failure, leaving only the recognition of continually reborn desire. But there is a glimpse of a further step, in which the hands may be "drawn away, to die." This is the ultimate failure of the desire itself, the final "Kiss of our agony" that he would then have to bear.

Myth or "vision" created out of the instinct for self-preservation. This is authentic Crane I think. I must cavil however with the implications of the phrases "for an instant he is able to see" and "There is a glimpse of a further step." Crane I think knew where he was going from the beginning of the poem. Vogler sees the poem as a drama of discovery, starting with a misguided quest for permanent vision, then a falling into disillusionment with the vision, and then a new "vision" of the poet as Sisyphus coming late in the poem. He says in discussion of "Cape Hatteras":

> The final "so—" seems hesitant, or at least questioning, as if the strained overwriting of much of the apostrophe shows more desire to believe than actual belief in the vision offered. This weakness eats away at the final affirmative power of the poem and forces us to keep in mind the ambiguity inherent in contrasting a presently accepted vision with a formerly accepted, but now rejected, vision.

"Cape Hatteras" is here I think once again sacrificed on the altar of a misreading—the common one of the section and the poem

striving towards simple belief and affirmation. *The Bridge* I have tried to show operates with the attitude of the poet as Sisyphus from the beginning. The poem leads up to nothing dialectically; sections are but variations on the themes of dualism and man's imaginative struggle against despair.

Vogler realizes that Crane is not speaking of a specific (American) myth, but of the psychological sense of integration one feels within any myth:

> It becomes increasingly clear throughout the poem that the myth to God is an attitude of mind rather than an allegoric organization of symbols . . . The main function of the "Proem," in terms of the whole, is to set the background of the poem: despair with the present, a longing for freedom, the possibility that the vision will prove as "apparitional" as a "panoramic sleight," and the desire to find a hopeful organization of experience, a myth that will enable the poet to avoid the "bedlamite's" end.

This is admirably stated except for the phrase "the possibility that." The "Proem" says that the "inviolateness" of the "curve" *is* apparitional. Volger sees "The Dance" as the vision (apparition) with which the poet is later disillusioned. I find that Crane knew from the beginning that he was dealing with imaginative, not mystic, integrations, and that *The Bridge* has the same continuous "vision" from beginning to end (the poet's moment of truth coming long before he began "Atlantis" as his *first* bit of writing of *The Bridge*). Vogler's idea of the poem as a dramatization of a "failed quest" necessarily throws off a bit his description of some of the sections. But the whole analysis seems to me to stay closer to the tone of the poem than any other I have cited so far in this chapter.

John Unterecker's article "The Architecture of *The Bridge*" (*Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, vol. 3, 1962) is full of fine explication and investigation of "integrating devices" in the language, imagery, time scheme, and other linkages of the

poem. It embraces also a view of the tone of the poem which, while it partakes somewhat of the "exultant dualism" position, does, by significant differences in emphasis, come very close to the actual attitudes of the poem.

Unterecker rightly sees Crane as dramatizing the tensions of the eternal opposites, the dualism, of which man is compounded:

> For each of these oppositions, Crane . . . finds a voice. And since he is an artist, Crane fits into his poem, too, the oppositions which almost every artist is conscious of: the vision of art that is democratic, open, and objective and which Crane identifies with Whitman; and its counterpart and opposite, an art that is intensely personal, secret, subjective—the art of the symbolist tradition which Crane associates with Poe.

Unterecker sees clearly everywhere that the dramatization of dualism is one of the purposes and principles of structure of *The Bridge,* and this is the *sine qua non* for criticism of *The Bridge.* Where, however, I must part ways with Unterecker is at his feeling that Crane is a Manichean who sees the eternal oppositions as necessary, nay, desirable:

> But though Crane assigns Whitman in "Cape Hatteras" to the Open Road and to the open air and links his name to summer and to comradeship and to joy—though Whitman becomes for him a symbol of life and though Poe, Whitman's opposite, is found trapped in the underground subjective subway on a very cold, drunken, dark December night, his eyes brim-full of death, we should not—indeed we must not—be led into the illusion that Crane finds one side of his design to be more praiseworthy than the other, or indeed that he fails to recognize that Whitman contains Poe and Poe, Whitman. Whitman and Poe, light and dark, joy and pain, life and death must—in Crane's scheme of things—finally both coexist and interpenetrate. For his bridge has two towers, each necessary for the support of the other. Only through the interaction of those opposed towers, as he points out at the

end of "Atlantis," can the suspension—"One Song, one Bridge of Fire"—be achieved.

"The Tunnel," that is, dramatizes no less praiseworthy an experience than "Atlantis," "Cutty Sark" as "Ave Maria." I see *The Bridge*, as Unterecker does, as a song *descriptive* of dualistic experience, but there is a confusing in Unterecker of describing it and exulting in it. Crane describes experience and the Process as the "way it is," and the way it is is tragic; it is not the way one would want it if one could do anything about it. I can, that is, accept everything in Unterecker's concluding paragraph except the implications of the word "hideous."

> Unity seems finally to triumph; and as Crane brings his poem to an end, opposites harmoniously merge: "rainbows ring/The serpent with the eagle in the leaves." But neither life nor death, neither land nor sea, neither present nor past can long remain fixed in such beautiful, hideous stasis, and in the last line of the poem Crane reminds us of that which we already know. Whispers hover through the cables of his bridge, warning us that already new oppositions are forming in the midst of momentary order: From the two blazing towers of Crane's emerged white structure "Whispers *antiphonal* in azure *swing*."

Unterecker sees Crane's vision of life as Process, of the cyclical building and destruction of myth. But poetic myths which weave aesthetic orders out of life are entirely beautiful to Crane (what he calls "absolute beauty"); *they* do not ever grow hideous, they are simply taken away from us as *life* grows hideous. Crane is not an absolutist, but that does not mean that he would not like to be, that he prefers the Process. Unterecker is warping Crane's position in having him (in Winter's terms) "glorify change." He is implying really a radical discontinuity of attitude in the poem between a tragic sense of life and an embracing of the tragic (as in "The Tunnel") as one tower of the Bridge, neces-

sary to support the other, which seems to me no more than a metaphoric reconciliation of life's tragic dualisms.[9]

The most valuable study yet to appear on *The Bridge* is in my estimation, that of R. W. B. Lewis (*The Poetry of Hart Cane: A Critical Study*, 1967). Mr. Lewis' book goes furthest towards the proper critical revaluation of Crane, and it does so in my opinion *despite* a strong impulse in Lewis to join the ranks of the romantic, mystic, transcendental interpreters.

Lewis has truly looked at the poems, he stays a long time with a text, he explicates with wide knowledge and good common sense, he articulates with great clarity and style. He has most importantly seen that Crane is not attempting to articulate a faith in any sort of transcendental Absolute or Ultimate or Higher Reality which endures or exists outside the psychic or aesthetic "moments of integration."

> Neither here nor anywhere else was Crane attempting to articulate an absolute vision; he was striving to show the familiar world transfigured and enshrined and so, poetically speaking, redeemed —yet still familiar, still our world (p. 420).

But Lewis invests these moments of poetic redemption, (what Crane has called moments of aesthetic apprehension, see p. 196), with all the slipperiness of transcendental rhetoric:

> For "Atlantis," Crane's hymn of praise to the creative imagination, arises from the knowledge that vision is precarious at best, and that it is never final. It scarcely endures beyond the moment of its utterance; one must always struggle to recover it and then to go beyond it. This is a radical truth, and one has only to stare out at the world for half a minute to be convinced of it. The visionary imagination at its farthest thrust works only in questions and surmises—to which the answers are silence or tantalizing whispers. But the vision lasts at least as long as the questions, and it is sustained by their intensity; while it lasts, the questions sound like their own answers (p. 373).

This is all correct and acute, I feel, but why the use of "vision" and "the visionary imagination" since the radical truth the poet "sees" is that these moments are not productive of "Absolute Truth" at all, but of a psychic or aesthetic truth. "Truth," that is, as adequacy, harmony, grace (see above, p. 197). In Crane's image from "Chaplinesque" (a key image for Lewis):

> . . . we have seen
> The moon in lonely alleys make
> A grail of laughter of an empty ash can.

The imagination of the poet that can do that is called "transfiguring," and so it is—for the poet and his reader, not the ash can. The "object" or the actual world is not "transformed," is not "divine" or "illuminated by" or "imbued with" divinity save in our apprehension of it. Yet Lewis wants everywhere to use such language of transcendental religious belief to express the aesthetic moment: the terms are of "apocalypse," "illumination," "ultimate revelation," "supreme visionary act," all leading to a "timeless reality," the "ideal world," a "transcendent reality," the "infinite," to "divinity," "God," to a higher "religious consciousness," to a "visionary promise of enduring life," to a "personal miraculous resurrection." One can twist all these words and phrases so that they fit the heavily qualified context of the passage quoted above, but the question is the point of doing so. Without the "vision" being "true" (Absolute) these moments are not moments of religious or romantic revelation or apocalypse or prophecy in any useful sense of these badgered words.

Yet finally why should the critic care if Crane is labeled as, say, a transcendentalist or "romantic" so long as criticism is clear on the limited, qualified use of the word and explicates a poem within that clarity? Well, because no one keeps so neat a shop, all the wrong uses of the words *will* spill in and one *will* find sooner or later less accuracy in critical response to local detail and to continuity of attitude. To illustrate: let us return to that key

passage of our own, those lines from "Atlantis," where the "traveler"

> Searches the timeless laugh of mythic spears.
> Like hails, farewells—up planet-sequined heights
> Some trillion whispering hammers glimmer Tyre:
> Serenely, sharply up the long anvil cry
> Of inchling aeons silence rivets Troy.
> And you, aloft there—Jason! hesting Shout!
> Still wrapping harness to the swarming air!

Lewis has this to say of the passage and of the traveler

> . . . he is the one who, in "The Dance," had visited the domain of mythic spears and witnessed the smoking pyres of love and death. More confidently than ever, he now draws upon that experience and the imagery in which it was articulated to read and understand the language of time. In the following stanza, he is even able to penetrate the "aeons" of "silence" which have buried the cities and heroes of legend: to hear echoes of Tyre and Troy, and of Jason . . . (p. 368)

My reading of the lines (in p. 152 above) was less apocalyptic: the poet is not trying really to "understand the language of time" or "penetrate the aeons," but simply to recapture through other people's poems the "timeless" human joy in myths. Myths (like the *Iliad* or Jason myths) come and go ("hail, farewell") in the Process. Mythmaking (conscious or unconscious, by a believer or not) is half absurd, the sequining of planets, the harnessing of air. Man (figured in the "trillion whispering hammers") is engaged always and ever in the futile, necessary business, out of an instinct of self-preservation. My reading of the lines allows for the complex ironies and double attitudes towards the imagination which are there and are obscured I think in Lewis' more rhapsodic reading. And one thinks back now of other more common "readings" by other critics of such passages of Crane, which find his rhetoric "tortured" and "inflated," "opaque" and "confused"—a

rhetoric which is in fact a sophisticated blend of parody, irony, and aesthetics. This is a most important point I think, for it is Crane's language, most damned when most misunderstood, that has thrown readers. And that language, tricky, subtle, sophisticated, is hardly the vehicle for transcendental, romantic poetry.

Another example—this the last line from the poem in *The Bridge* entitled "Southern Cross"—"Light drowned the lithic trillions of your spawn" I have explicated in this way: out of mankind's desire for myths which are true have come the innumerable myths ("lithic trillions") that are not true ("I wanted you, nameless Woman of the South"), and so endlessly the ocean of Change "daily" destroys our myths. She, then, the woman spoken to, is the imagination's hunger for Absolutes, she from whom the poet wishes, never gets, more. Lewis is disturbed by the line ("this enigmatic line implies, I suppose, the general effect of woman upon man . . .") because he has not postulated a Crane as detached about the imagination's powers as I think the line, and Crane's diction in general, calls for.

Lewis is then imprecise at times, never because he is not a close reader—he is in the main one of the very best—but when his metacritical posture concerning transcendentalism and romanticism blurs the scene. In "Cutty Sark," the alcoholic dreams of the beat sailor are hardly visions, are nightmares rather, out of a lost soul, "some white machine that sings." The poet-observer in that poem is in no such sad shape, and the grotesque machine image is highly inappropriate for *his* situation. Yet:

> . . . the poet becomes aware of the loftier possibility, and remembers his mission: which is, to "start some white machine that sings." The phrase condenses the whole purpose of *The Bridge* . . . (p. 321)

But such instances where Lewis sacrifices the tone of a phrase, line, or passage (and hence its continuity in context) to beat a quasi-transcendent, quasi-romantic line are not many. Lewis'

book comes closer more often than any other to the tone of *The Bridge*. He considers that Hart Crane is "one of the finest modern poets in our language"—a judgment with which I quite agree. Lewis explicates generally with great brilliance and marvelous insight. But the book demonstrates a difficulty Lewis is having within himself, a difficulty I see as representative of the present generation of criticism's last obstacle with Crane as a major poet: the throwing off of the accepted view of Crane as in the romantic transcendental tradition. The feeling of this writer is that *The Bridge* emerges as a major, rather unflawed, continuous poem if one reads its sections with some precision concerning the body of attitudes with which it is truly concerned.

The premise of these essays has been that the fundamental, the essential critical act, is the accurate-as-possible response to the unique body of attitudes present in a work (its "tone") and the precise-as-possible articulation of that response. I have been at pains to demonstrate that inaccurate responses to the body of attitudes impelling Hart Crane's *The Bridge* has been the fundamental reason for the finding in it (by even the most sympathetic critics) incoherences, inconsistencies ("discontinuities"), unevenness, authorial confusions and stylistic blemishes. One is not led to expect the body of attitudes that I have tried to demonstrate impel *The Bridge* by the reading of most of the literature on Crane. That that body of attitudes does inform the poem and all its lines (if the reader has accepted my analysis) is ample testimony to the fact that the artist at work is often a very different person from the artist at large in a time or place. To ignore this difference is usually to judge a work of art not by observing it but by seeing correspondences in it to concerns of other disciplines, biographical, historical, psychological, sociological, philosophical,

etc. One's grasp of the uniqueness and the continuity of a work of art is the pivotal act in the whole analytic process—it is the moment of criticism—and while one cannot methodize the critical act by a critical approach, the approach (a way, a road in the right direction) can create the proper goals, proper atmosphere, proper frame of mind for analysis. One will not look then for the ways in which Crane is like Emerson or Whitman, or is representative of his age or its malaise, or of a syndrome in pathology, or his poem of mythic archetypes or religious iconography. He will, unseduced by the beguiling literature on Crane, look for what *The Bridge* seems to be about, and he will find, if this study and its approach is anywhere near accurate, that the poem is a piece of art greater and wider than most of the essays in that literature would have it.

And then it is that a real Cinderella has her proper slipper.

# Notes

## 1. *The Rape of Cinderella*

1. Kenneth Burke's formulation, "Form in literature is an arousing and fulfillment of desires"—"Lexicon Rhetoricae," *Counter-statement.*

I think most critics write their actual criticism with some such formulations as these instinctively in mind. See for example Leo Marx's article on *Huckleberry Finn* in the *American Scholar* (Summer, 1953), where the farcical handling of the Negro Jim's quest for freedom in the last fifth of the novel is deplored.

Metacriticism can be vastly impressive and central to life and experience, as is so often the case with Sam Johnson's. It may in fact be more valuable than criticism, but it is not criticism. See chap. 11 herein on "Metacriticism."

2. Arthur Mizener in his "Character and Action in the Case of Criseyde" (*PMLA* LIV, pp. 65-81). I offer the above remarks on *Troilus* not as new insight (though I wrote them thinking them so) but to introduce the critical approach that informs this book.

3. William Empson treats of this complexity of tone in an essay on "double irony" in *Tom Jones* in *The Kenyon Review* (vol. XX, 1958). See chap. Seven for a fuller presentation of my own view of *Tom Jones.*

4. These breaks in tone of which I have been speaking are not (necessarily) what criticism of the past used to call violations of "decorum" (cf. Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*). Rules of decorum were fashioned from external and abstract aesthetic (and other) considerations and applied to literary works. What I speak of here are

"rules" the author sets himself—obligations to continuity that are subtly different with each individual work.

5. Miss Rosemond Tuve in her *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* asserts that images of these periods were not intended for rigorous logical analysis and that we are reading wrongly when we do scrutinize them closely. This is really an argument of degree, for no one can read poetry mindlessly. I simply submit that the two comparisons of Spenser that I've discussed violate one's sensibility on even a very surface reading.

6. R. W. Chambers gave us immensely valuable information on *Beowulf*, and yet for criticism he offers that "myth . . . drives in *Beowulf* into episodes and digressions the things which should be the main stuff of a well-conducted epic." It remained for J. R. Tolkein to say, critically, that *Beowulf* may not in fact be an epic but it is very good as a sort of elegy with a structure all its own.

## 2. Lycidas *as Pastiche*

1. Cf. René Wellek's chapter on "The Mode of Existence of a Literary Work of Art" in his *Theory of Literature* for a discussion of the objective existence of what are called "norms" in the literary work (what I call a "normative tone" in chap. Ten, "The Critical Act"). W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe Beardsley postulate this common psychological state in the conclusion of their essay "The Affective Fallacy":

> "Poetry is a way of fixing emotions or making them more permanently perceptible when objects have undergone a functional change from culture to culture, or when as simple facts of history they have lost emotive value with loss of immediacy . . . A structure of emotive objects so complex and so reliable as to have been taken for great poetry by any past age will never, it seems safe to say, so wane with the waning of human culture as not to be recoverable at least by a willing student. (*The Verbal Icon* (1954), pp. 38-9)

This objective structure of emotions (or tone) is distinguished in the essay from emotions inspired in the reader not by the text but by extrinsic personal considerations.

2. The remarks to follow concerning the structure of *Lycidas* have perhaps a Burkean tinge in method and approach. "Qualitative progression" is Burke's term for the emotional flow I find informing *Lycidas*.

3. Cf. John Crowe Ransom's summation in his essay "A Poem Nearly Anonymous": "Milton's bold play with the forms of discourse constitutes simply one more item in his general insubordinacy." (ibid., Patrides, p. 80). Also interestingly, in the eighteenth century, Richard Hurd . . . "There is a very original air in it, though it is full of classical imitations" . . . and in the nineteenth, William Hazlitt . . . "A certain tender gloom overspreads it, a wayward abstraction, a forgetfulness of his subject in the serious reflections that arise out of it. The gusts of passion come and go like the sounds of music borne on the wind. . ." (ibid., Elledge, p. 228, 232).

4. Michael Lloyd (in *MLN* LXXV, pp. 103-8) takes an opposite tack to those few critics who attempt to explicate the lines. He asserts that the bark is man's fallen, perfidious body. The eclipse is the Fall, the curse is mortality—again the Christian answer to the problem of Death. I find this dubious (it accuses King of the human frailties, which the poem avoids doing elsewhere). But if this *were* Milton's intent for the lines, it would be just another example of the abruptness and pastiche-like quality of the mind flow of the poet.

5. Compare Hopkins' similar leap in "Heraclitean Fire" (which I discuss in chapter Three:

> . . . all is in an enormous dark
> Drowned, O pity and indignation! Manshape, that shone
> Sheer off, disseveral, a star, death blots black out; nor mark
> Is any of him at all so stark
> But vastness blurs and time beats level. Enough!
> the Resurrection,
> A heart's-clarion! Away grief's gasping.

6. Wayne Shumaker in his "Flowerets and Sounding Seas" and M. H. Abrams in his "Five Types of Lycidas" do handle the problem of the abrupt transitions in *Lycidas* which I have focused on. Shumaker, quite rightly I feel, labels the structural movement "affective," "not logically but emotionally inductive" and shakes up fixed ideas effectively by calling the "leap" discussed above "a natural emotional rhythm, illustrated in the abnormal level by the

familiar manic-depressive pattern" (Patrides, p. 127). Abrams' essay is masterful in pulling together all the strands of *Lycidas* criticism, but I find unconvincing his argument that Saint Peter's speech plants the final "resolution" in the shepherd's mind (the implications of the speech being released by an associative link between Lycidas floating on the water and Christ walking on it, see pp. 228-9, Patrides).

## 3. *Hopkins and* Figura

1. Geoffrey Hartman in his introduction to *Hopkins: a Collection of Critical Essays* (1966). The statement is not extreme—cf. the essays of this collection and the rest of the Hopkins bibliography. The constant attempts to define Hopkins' terms "inscape" and "instress" and work from Duns Scotus to the poems have helped to approach the dramas of the poems but do not bring the reader into them. The approach through the concept of *Figura* is I think a better avenue.

2. In the Hartman collection cited above, the essays by H. Marshall McLuhan and J. Hillis Miller treat of Hopkins' "analogic" vision in terms close to Auerbach's, but see it as a constant or evolving vision, which blurs the focus of the later poems and, in places, the tensions of the earlier.

3. For example, in the last three lines of the sonnet "The Starlight Night," the image is of the world as a granary and Christian revelation as the grain within (the "piece-bright paling" refers to the particulate, pied beauty of nature):

> These are indeed the barn; within doors house
> The shocks. This piece-bright paling shuts the spouse
> Christ home, Christ and his mother and all his hallows.

## 4. *Keats: Bathos in* Hyperion

1 . . . in power of imagery and diction, in surety of phrasing, this remarkable fragment stands out, in its own right, as one of the great examples of English blank verse.

(Walter Jackson Bate-*Major British Writers* [1959], p. 332)

The discrepancy between my position above and Prof. Bate's is not so wide as it seems, as he is focusing on the triumphs and I on the lapses of language in *Hyperion*.

2. Lest the reader feel that I have been merely carping critically over obvious infelicities, I must submit that a "visionary" eye can see it all differently:

> Though still worshiped by mortals as the sun's god, Hyperion is insecure, troubled by omens. In a titanic failure of nerve, he attempts to hasten sunrise by six hours, but cannot master the universe he must serve. . . .
>
> The technical achievement of Keats, throughout these first two books of his poem, is subtly to advance the Titans toward the condition of mortality. With this progressive humanization, they gain in our sympathetic self-identification and yet become less in truth and beauty, for they move toward the organic paradox of human existence.
>
> (Harold Bloom *The Visionary Company* [New York, 1961] pp. 383-5)

There is clearly no argument allowed with such apocalyptic justification of banal diction.

## 5. *Wallace Stevens'* Sunday Morning

1. This definition of Stevens' characteristic tonality is based on my *Wallace Stevens: An Anatomy of Figuration* (1965). There is at present considerable (and slippery) debate as to whether or not Stevens is in one way or another a "romantic." The aim of this essay is precision concerning the attitudes in *Sunday Morning* and the lack of inner consistency, or the discontinuity, of some of them. The Stevens debate is barren without such precision concerning the tonality of his poems, as indeed (it has been the point of these essays) is any debate on any poems.

2. Lines 13-14 of stanza IV of the first version (V in the final version) read:

> She causes boys to bring sweet-smelling pears
> And plums in ponderous piles. The maidens taste . . .

Harriet Monroe found these original two lines impossible to understand, and Stevens obligingly though reluctantly changed them: see *Letters of Wallace Stevens* (1966) p. 183, letter 194. Stevens submitted the eight stanza version just as we have it now to Miss Monroe. She apparently had misgivings about parts or the length of the poem, and in letter 193 Stevens agrees to change it: "Provided your selection of the numbers of *Sunday Morning* is presented in the following order: I, VIII, IV, V, I see no objection to cutting down. The order is necessary to the idea." In letter 194 he further asks that stanza VII be added as a concluding stanza. So Stevens himself was responsible for the five stanza arrangement and aware that he was producing thereby a poem of different tone.

3. The "disregarded plate" in Stevens' original lines, in the lines which bothered Miss Monroe, refers to poems which present (or re-present) nature. The poems are disregarded in the inhuman universe, regarded highly by human desire ("The maidens taste and stray impassioned," etc.)

4. The figuration of the "nigger," "black man," "subman," "second self," "nigger mystic," is rife in the poems, connoting innocence, awe, sensuality, responsiveness, primitiveness, wonder, and natural worship. See, for example, the black men Cotton and Sly who twist imaginative "kinks" from sun-dazzle in "Some Friends from Pascagoula" (*Collected Poems* 126-7). The black men are treated either with affectionate irony or with distance.

5. Letter 279 (p. 250) of Stevens' *Letters* (op. cit.) *re* these lines: "Of the last two lines, it is probably the last that is obscure to you. Life is as fugitive as dew upon the feet of men dancing in dew. Men do not either come from any direction or disappear in any direction. Life is as meaningless as dew."

This is hardly romantic utterance. And yet the lines have been used by criticism to point affirmation: "The shorter poem, ending on the high note of pagan ceremony, is more affirmatively hedonistic than the longer. . . ." (Joseph Riddel *The Clairvoyant Eye: The Poetry and Poetics of Wallace Stevens* [1965])

The position is perhaps the opposite of that I take here (though, in general, Prof. Riddel's reading of the poem is closer to mine than some others).

6. Compare the different treatment of evil in the following lines from *Esthetique du Mal* (*Collected Poems*, 324):

. . . . in his Mediterranean cloister a man,
Reclining, eased of desire, establishes
The visible, a zone of blue and orange
Versicolorings, establishes a time
To watch the fire-feinting sea and calls it good,
The ultimate good, sure of a reality
Of the longest meditation, the maximum,
The assassin's scene. Evil in evil is
Comparative. The assassin discloses himself,
The force that destroys us is disclosed, within
This maximum, an adventure to be endured
With the politest helplessness. Ay-mi!
One feels its action moving in the blood.

I refer the reader to the first chapter of William Wimsatt's *Hateful Contraries* (1965), especially p. 22, for a brilliant attack on the logic of the "exultant" posture towards dualism.

## 6. *"Nighttown": Joyce's* Ulysses

1. The literature on Joyce is of course immense, but pertinent here only is the fact that (while a few of the commentators see the literary artifice in "Nighttown" clearly enough) the idea of the whole of "Nighttown" as a dramatization of the characters' seething unconscious mind seems still to be a fixed one. Stanley Sultan for instance in his *The Argument of Ulysses* (1964) considers "Nighttown" a series of fantasies in the mind of Bloom and Stephen (p. 303). See Richard Ellmann's "The Backgrounds of Ulysses" (*Kenyon Review* XVI, pp. 337-386) for material on and insights into "Nighttown."

2. The point of this essay is, of course, that more of "Nighttown" and *Ulysses* has the third intention than most critics want to allow. So predominant is it that I find the essential tone of *Ulysses* to be that of a rather "decadent" author-reader intimacy concerning literary effects. The cliché description of the mode of *Ulysses* as "stream of consciousness" seems deceptive to me. Streams of consciousness of the *characters*, at any rate, occupy only a part of the book. The author's literary stream of consciousness is perhaps

more often what the book renders. The book from these points of view, as from others, is much like *Tristram Shandy* (see chap. Eight).

3. Arnold Goldman in his *The Joyce Paradox* (1966) lists other examples and concludes that "Nighttown" is the "dream" or "fantasy" of James Joyce. This comes closer than any other to my own position here; the difference is in the literalness with which Goldman uses "dream." Where I speak of parodic mocks of points of view Goldman speaks of "incompatible modes of vision." In other words Goldman finds the center of tonality in *Ulysses* in a Kierkegaardian philosophic seriousness, I find it in burlesque irony of all such.

4. The trouble with commentators upon mythic patterns in Joyce (with respect to *Ulysses*—see for instance Stuart Gilbert's *James Joyce's Ulysses*)—is that they usually regard Joyce's usage of myth as more serious than mocking. I can agree fully with Rudolph Von Abele:

> . . . the book, read truly, emerges as triumphant comedy, immeasurably more alive than its symbolic apparatus literally taken. . . . In *Ulysses*, that is, the world of myth is put under comic criticism by a world of antimyth. . . .
>
> (*PMLA* LXIX, p. 364)

The proper tonal focusing of *Ulysses*, I think, came back in 1922 when Ezra Pound linked Joyce with Rabelais and in 1928 when Wyndham Lewis found him a humorous writer in the tradition of Laurence Sterne and a craftsman with no special point of view.

5. Robert M. Adams in *Ulysses, Surface and Symbol* (1962) demonstrates the difficulties with the list and concludes differently. Richard Ellmann in "The Backgrounds of *Ulysses*" (*Kenyon Review* XVI, p. 383) says flatly that the two lovers Molly has had since her marriage are Bartell Darcy and Blazes Boylan.

## 7. *Complex Irony in* Tom Jones

1. For example, this from Leavis' first chapter:

> But we haven't to read a very large proportion of *Tom Jones* in order to discover the limits of the essential interests it has to

offer us. Fielding's attitudes, and his concern with human nature, are simple, and not such as to produce an effect of anything but monotony (on a mind, that is, demanding more than external action when exhibited at the length of an 'epic in prose').

2. Randall Jarrell on Empson:

> We can sympathize with someone when he says lovingly about a critic, as Empson says about I. A. Richards, that we get more from *him* when he's wrong than we do from other people when they're right. I myself have sometimes felt this way about Empson.
>
> *Poetry and the Age* (1953), p. 83

And I often feel this way about Empson *and* Jarrell.

3. Andrew Wright's fine *Henry Fielding: Mask and Feast* (1965) would express the tone of *Tom Jones* thus: "a highly organized, tightly woven artistic recreation of the materials of 'Nature' —all done for a festive reason. To celebrate is to make life, and even death, endurable" (p. 43, "recreation," in the sense of "re-creation"); i.e. Fielding sees life tragically, consciously warps life in the novel to make it appear festive by donning the entertainer's mask. This is sufficiently different from my approach to put my response to the book's complexity on record. Robert Alter's recent *Fielding And The Nature of The Novel* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968) is likewise excellent, but he speaks of a "metaphysical certainty" which is a "limitation on his range" (p. 78). This essay on Fielding's attitudes tries to demonstrate the opposite.

4. For the relevant passages see Bk. I, chap. 6; Bk. IX, chap. 7; Bk. X, chap. 8; Bk. XVII, chap. 9; Bk. XVIII, chap. 8.

## 8. *The Local Textures of* Tristram Shandy

1. Work, pp. xlv-xlvi. Professor Work notes also in his Preface that "when Sterne first offered the ms. of *Tristram Shandy* to Dodsley he observed that his local readers wished him to send the work into the world "*cum Notis Variorum*," and added that "there is great Room for it."

Ian Watt's edition of *Tristram* (1965) has a fine introduction and provides notes of the same character as Work's. But there is "no attempt to provide a full apparatus or commentary [or] . . . to ex-

plain Sterne's scabrous or indecent allusions" (xliv). It is my feeling that these are just what is needed to bring full light to *Tristram Shandy*.

2. Sigurd Burckhardt, a subtle modern reader, apparently is only more honest than many another (and perhaps a little sly) when he says "I am far from able to solve the vastly complicated problem of Sterne's narrative machinery . . ." (*ELH*, 28:1:80).

3. Then, Sir, I must have missed a page.—No, Madam,—you have not missed a word.—Then I was asleep, Sir.—My pride, Madam, cannot allow you that refuge.—Then, I declare, I know nothing at all about the matter.—That, Madam, is the very fault I lay to your charge; and as a punishment for it, I do insist upon it, that you immediately turn back, that is, as soon as you get to the next full stop, and read the whole chapter over again. (Bk. I, chap. 20)

4. The first time I read the second paragraph of chapter 3 ("What a devil of an apothecary") I took the complaints to be Tristram's over his tuberculosis (the last books have many such). Such a misreading is typical of the local problems of the book, as it would change the tone of the paragraph drastically.

5. Leavis speaks scornfully of Sterne's "irresponsible (and nasty) trifling" and of the *milieu* which regarded him "as in some way extraordinarily significant and mature"; Saintsbury talks in terms of *Shandy*'s "salient passages"; Cross laments "Had the time he wasted in dazzling his friends with literary fireworks been devoted to a logical presentation of the wealth of his experiences, fancies, and feelings, he might have written one of the most perfect pieces of composition in the English language."

6. See William J. Farrell's "Nature versus Art as a Comic Pattern in *Tristram Shandy*" (*ELH*, 30:1:16-35) for a fine analysis of artifice vs. realism in dialogue and gesture.
The philosopher David Hume's reaction to Sterne is interesting: "With all his drollery there is a sameness of extravagance which tires us. We have just a succession of surprise, surprise, surprise" (Howes, p. 34). He sees the artifice and does not consider it artful.

7. Making the most of the free and easy conversational manner he adopts toward his reader, Sterne mischieviously tries to trick

him and not infrequently, to his obvious glee, he succeeds. Amusing but precarious, as a consequence is the reader's pursuit of the devious but almost unexceptionally logical sequence—by association—of ideas in *Tristram Shandy* (Work, p. ii)

Ian Watt (in his *The Rise of the Novel*, 1957) and Dorothy Van Ghent (in *The English Novel*, 1953) are equally hesitant in their discussions of the stream of consciousness as they see clearly the artist-at-work in the book. Likewise Alan McKillop in his masterful *The Early Masters of English Fiction* (1956): "Effects are carefully calculated, and Sterne looks at his scenes and characters with an artist's eye" (p. 185), and W. C. Watkins' *Perilous Balance* (1939): "Sterne was a born artist with an artist's instinctive and irresistible feeling for effects . . . " (p. 154), and Joan Hall in *MLQ* (24:2:143): "The enjoyment of the novel is two-sided, delight of the antics of the Shandy world and delight of the foiled expectations of the reader." But the implications of the insights are not drawn in any of these essays.

8. See John Traugott's *Tristram Shandy's World* (1954) and Sigurd Burckhardt's "*Tristram Shandy's* Law of Gravity" *ELH*, 28: 1:70). Also J. M. Stedmond's "Genre and *Tristram Shandy*" *PQ*, 38:1:37), W. M. Piper's *Laurence Sterne* (1965), and Robert Donovan's *The Shaping Vision* (1966) chap. 5, for other suggestive formulations. Henri N. Fluchere's *Laurence Sterne: From Tristram to Yorick* (1965) is formidable and highly intelligent, but his formulation is rather disappointing: "There is no need to look for the structure of the book anywhere but in this desire to translate the processes of the mind . . . it is the story of Tristram's mind that is being related" (p. 77).

## 9. *Shakespeare's Games with His Audience*

1. Research into the composition of Shakespeare's audience, their intellectual and economic levels, seems to me a bit of a red herring for criticism. It appears that any sort of a prepared audience picks up gesture, tone, and nuance far more subtle than what I postulate here: witness audience reaction to all sorts of folk arts, or music hall shenanigans. The tendency to deprecate Shakespeare's

audience, and by extension aspects of Shakespeare's plays, is beautifully countered by Moody Prior in his "The Elizabethan Audience and the Plays of Shakespeare" (*Modern Philology*, vol. 49, 1952, pp. 101-23). My remarks above are really not so much on Shakespeare's audience as on what the plays seem to demand of an audience. J. L. Styan's recent *Shakespeare's Stagecraft* (London, 1967) in passing postulates an actor-audience relationship with which I can agree completely:

> Every actor must be ready to pass temporarily outside the action of the story. He has to do more than play in character: he has also to play as if he were a chorus, setting and lighting the stage and prompting a response to it . . . It is probable that Shakespeare saw his actors as playing to their audience most of the time.

2. There are a great number of books and essays on "conventions" in Elizabethan drama, some of critical magnitude, Stoll's and Schucking's for example (and see J.I.M. Stewart's *Character and Motive in Shakespeare* for a recent consideration of these). The monumental books in the field are M.C. Bradbrook's *Elizabethan Stage Conditions* and *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy*. "Conventions" like "decorums" (see chap. 1, fn. 4 of this book) must have organic justification like anything else in art. An author engaging in a convention for the convention's sake is a priori culpable just as Milton would be culpable if traditional usage in pastorale elegy were the only reason he included conventional material in *Lycidas*. It seems to me axiomatic that each use of a "convention" by an Elizabethan playwright has to be examined for its fitness each time by the serious critic. That Shakespeare uses conventions used also by his colleagues is no argument that they manage anything like his subtlety or continuity of tone in their contexts.

3. Alfred Harbage in his *Theatre for Shakespeare* (1955) is a distinguished advocate for this attitude towards the playing of Shakespeare.

## *10. The Critical Act*

1. W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. at the end of his chapter "The Concrete Universal" in *The Verbal Icon* speaks of the possibility of objective criticism and uses the concept of *Pi* ($\pi$) which is of course the con-

cept of limit (*The Verbal Icon* itself is a storehouse of insights into the "domain of criticism"). See fn. 1 of the *Lycidas* chapter for more on "objective tone."

2. Its "context" *may* be larger than the work-in-itself. The drama of a Hopkins poem is enriched by the whole canon; a Stevens poem can only be understood with any precision after a study of the whole canon; Pope demands in his *Dunciad* that you secure outside topical information to understand some of his wit; an author may demand that you know the history of his time in something like the detail and way in which he does. A work's context need not be self-contained or inviolable, only accessible and consistent in its demands. The "contextual" theory of a literary work's being a "self-sufficient system of symbols that comes to terms with itself" (Murray Krieger, *A Window to Criticism*, 1964, p. 29) is something else again, and too severe for me (as it is for him).

3. cf. Malcolm Bradbury's "Towards a Poetics of Fiction" (*Novel* vol. I, no. I):

> My case is that, while there is no single dynamic that is generically characteristic of the novel, its main structural characteristic lies in a developing action about characters and events conducted in a closed—that is to say, an authorially conditioned —world containing principles, values and attitudes by which we may evaluate those events.

Robert Donovan's major theme of his "*The Shaping Vision*" (1966) is similar.

4. Meyer Abrams, in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines the usage of the two phrases thus:

> Theoretical criticism undertakes to establish, on the basis of general principles, the distinctions and categories to be applied to literature, and the general criteria, or "standards," by which it is to be judged as good or bad. Practical criticism, or "applied criticism," brings these elements to bear in the discussion of particular works.

This idea of criticism as an "application" of already formulated categories or standards is deadening to the critics' art. René Wellek's comment in his *Concepts of Criticism* (1963) is pertinent, ". . . let us try to keep the meaningful distinction between 'theory'

concerned with principles, categories, devices, etc., and 'criticism' as a discussion of concrete works of literature" (p. 36). Wellek is, I think quite rightly bothered by the grandiose expansion of the idea of what criticism is:

> Increasingly, one comes across such statements as that of Elder Olson: "criticism," he tells us, "is a departure of philosophy. A given comprehensive philosophy invariably develops a certain view of art"; or, in a new reversal of traditional views, a criticism is simply considered a philosophy and even a form of theology, an all-inclusive system, a world hypothesis.

All of which seems to me a confusion between criticism and meta-criticism (as I have tried to distinguish them in these chapters).

5. In 1) Wimsatt's Introduction to the Rinehardt ed. of Pope and his "The Augustan Mode" in *Hateful Contraries* (1965); 2) Chapter One of Whicher's *The Presence of Walt Whitman* (1962).

6. His essay "The Age of Criticism" therein is bound to infuriate in one place or another, but admitting its looseness in sections, I feel it quite correct in tendency and spirit:

> Critics exist simply to help us with works of art—isn't that true? Once, talking to a young critic, I said as a self-evident thing, "Of course, criticism's necessarily secondary to the works of art it's about." He looked at me as if I had kicked him, and said: "Oh, that's not so!" (I had kicked him, I realized.) And recently I heard a good critic, objecting to most of the criticism in the quarterlies, say what real criticism did: what it did, as he put it, was almost exactly what people usually say that religion, love, and great works of art do. Criticism, which began by humbly and anomalously existing for the work of art, has by now become, for a good many people, almost what the work of art exists for: the animals come up to Adam and Eve and are named—the end crowns the work.

7. M. H. Abrams puts it this way, in continuing his discussion of archetypal criticism (see above, p. 123).

> And so with any conceptual scheme that uses distant analogy as proof and possesses built-in expedients for universal application. The same literary work in which the archetypist discovers

a seasonal myth will turn out to have quite a different pattern of sub-surface meaning when analysed by a Freudian, a Marxist, a Nietzschean, or a Hegelian critic.

*University of Toronto Quarterly* (Jan. 1959, p. 195)

8. Remarks like these from the *Poetics* are not criticism (yet are valuable):

> The poet being an imitator, like a painter or any other artist, must of necessity represent one of three objects—things as they were or are, things as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be. (XXV)
>
> They [painters] while reproducing the distinctive form of the original, make a likeness which is true to life and yet more beautiful. So too the poet, in representing men who are irascible or indolent, or have other defects of character, should preserve the type and yet enoble it. (XV)

9. Or in Brooks' terms, dramatic propriety; or in Burke's terms, fulfilled expectations, accomplished ritual or actualized symbol; or in Blackmur's terms, completed gesture; or in other terms, resolved tensions, internal coherence, unity, or consistency.

## *11. Metacriticism*

1. I would refer the reader to the writings of Wimsatt and of Murray Krieger, especially their "dialogue" in Krieger's *The Play and Place of Criticism* (1967), chapter 14. The terms used on this plane of argument, the poem as "incarnation" (Wimsatt) or as "miracle" (Krieger) as dramatizing the "suffering, the optimism, the mystery," the "Hateful Contraries" of life (Wimsatt), or as providing us with "momentary purification" through "illusion" against existential tragedy (Krieger), make it clear that we are in the area of religion or search for religious substitute. Criticism will always *end* here in metacriticism. The point of this book is that criticism *begins* (ought to begin) in the critical act, as I have defined it above.

2. Two approaches towards value in an art work are polarized thus by Murray Kreiger, though, as formulated, he considers neither acceptable.

1) The literary work, in proportion to its value as literary work, reveals the full existential density of life as lived in all its desperate, unresolvable tensions; the unbridgeable oppositions that our philosophy must override and our daily living ignore for these to operate. Therefore literature is justified by relating itself directly to the world of experience. 2) The literary work, in proportion to its value as literary work is a self-sufficient aesthetic system of intramural relations among symbols that together strive toward a oneness that contains its reader by compelling upon him a unified response that inhibits an escape to the world.

(*A Window to Criticism* (1964) pp. 17-18)

The first approach is a major one today, the second is not really prevalent. (A work of either sort can of course be continuous in attitude.) A third option then seems to me arguable: the literary work, in proportion to its value as a literary work, dramatizes a continuity of vision, of attitudes towards life (and perhaps death) which expresses the human desire that life be continuous.

## 12. The Bridge

1. The critical language used in this essay is perhaps inevitably tinged by my study of Stevens' poetry (see chap. 5, fn. 1). It may seem a bit heavy on words like "hunger" or "desire for order" and on "imagination" and "reality." But the language is I think correct *for this particular poet*. Crane's own prose in his essays and letters (critical prose which I feel, incidentally, is much more distinguished and perceptive than many allow) uses similar language. (I refer the reader ahead to my discussion of some of Crane's statements concerning his poetic intent, p. 195). I do not want to try to buttress or adorn my reading of the poem by unnecessary appeals outside the poem. I do not feel that I have ground Crane up in a Stevens' mill. It is interesting that Crane was one of Stevens' earliest and most fervent admirers. I feel that their similarity of basic attitudes toward the imagination's constructs within reality points toward a basic area of agreement among many modern poets, an agreement conditioned by their being poets, not philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, historians, etc., etc.

2. Deena Metzger ("Hart Crane's *Bridge:* The Myth Active" *Arizona Quarterly*, vol. XX, pp. 36-46) demonstrates Crane's knowledge and use (in "The Dance") of the middle American myths of Quetzalcoatl and of Tenochtitlan which include Serpent and Eagle figures. But she applies her interpretation of the myths too literally to *The Bridge:* she sees the serpent and eagle as "characteristic of two antithetical cultural tendencies," the Indian and European, whose future fusion is prophesied in the "Plumed Serpent" resurrection of Quetzalcoatl. Serpent and Eagle (Time and Space) symbolize for Crane much wider problems of man in the universe than how to reconcile America's Indian and European heritage. He uses and transforms motifs from these myths, as he does from Greek, Hebrew and other myths, to comment on man's mythologizing. For further comment on Metzger's approach see p. 222.

3. I refer the reader to p. 195, for (unnecessary) documentation from Crane's essays and letters of 1) definitions of "myth," and "absolute" as I have used them in my analysis; 2) a denial of transcendant intentions in *The Bridge* 3) an evaluation of "poetic truth" over "absolute truth" as Crane sees it in Plato.

## *13. The Critics*

1. The Helen of "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" is (as are the various women of *The Bridge*) representative of orders ("beauty") achieved in the poetic consciousness:

> But if I lift my arms it is to bend
> To you who turned away once, Helen, knowing
> The press of troubled hands, too alternate
> With steel and soil to hold you endlessly.
> I meet you, therefore, in that eventual flame
>
> You found in final chains, no captive then—
> Beyond their million brittle, bloodshot eyes;
> White, through white cities passed on to assume
> That world which comes to each of us alone.
>
> Accept a lone eye riveted to your plane,
> Bent axle of devotion along companion ways
> That beat, continuous, to hourless days—
> One inconspicuous, glowing orb of praise.

The moments of "seeing," ("apprehending,") Helen come and go for the poet immersed in the reality of "steel and soil." The "final chains" are those of resignation to man's dualistic condition (the million bloodshot eyes). The "world which comes to each of us alone" is the private, unreal, sufficient world poetry ("praise") puts us in, timeless ("hourless") for the moment.

2. Howard Moss (*Poetry*, April, 1943, "Disorder as Myth," pp. 32-45) is far less subtle in applying sociological and historical preconceptions to the poem.

> The myth of America has become the pact between Whitman and Crane. The frontier is celebrated, but its concrete achievement has been evaded. This results in a kind of sentimentalizing —the same kind that characterizes Auden and Spender and the contemporary intellectual world: will and action never meet; one can advocate the Utopian result, but one can never murder to achieve it. Crane's problem is even more serious. He doesn't even begin to understand the transformation necessary in order to make his frontier a reality. Action merely operates as a tradition devoid of contemporary meanings. The attempt to resolve the problem of murder and creation is the central problem of contemporary poetry.
>
> We know he failed because there is still no American myth; he left his material where he found it, in the disparate sections of American history.

Crane's only gun against contemporary reality is the imagination. And his whole vision of Process and the impossibility of permanent Utopias negates Moss's thesis or at least renders it irrelevant to *The Bridge* (though not to revolutionary politics).

3. Malcolm Cowley, another close acquaintance of Crane's has not published much on *The Bridge*. The early review he did in the *New Republic* (April 23, 1930) finds *The Bridge* a greater success than did either Tate or Winters, but Cowley's approach, that the poem "ends bravely in an attempt to create the myth of America" and that "The River" is a "celebration of the Mississippi" is not much different as an articulation of tone from theirs.

Oscar Cargill in articles reprinted in his *Towards a Pluralistic Criticism* (1965) is very harsh towards these early critics of Crane while himself being rather thin and imprecise about *The Bridge*

("But the theme of *The Bridge* is not 'The Greatness of America,' as Tate assumes, but the instinctive aspiration of America toward universal love.")

4. David Clark, in a later investigation of Crane's language ("Hart Crane's Technique," *Texas Studies*, 1962), has something of the same ambivalence towards his subject as Blackmur:

> In Crane, the logical structure is hidden, most indirectly hinted at through psychological symbols. It is to be discovered. If found, it will prove to be as sound within its scope as Crashaw's. Sometimes, however, it cannot be found.
>
> Lack of logic in the texture is the means of throwing the reader off the track in his search for logical structure, and psychological association in texture is the means of making the reader look for a psychological poetic organization. The reader is to feel the logic as marginally as a reader of eighteenth-century philosophical poetry is to feel the process of emotion and psychological association. Examples of both types of poetry often fail to achieve wholeness because of weaknesses inherent in the techniques.

The distinctions are admirable, the judgment, I think, premature. The logic is easier to find than Clark would have it if one senses the controlling attitudes of *The Bridge*.

5. Herbert Leibowitz's recent *Hart Crane: An Introduction to The Poetry* (New York, 1968) handles *The Bridge* only in passing, but he is clearly in the transcendental camp:

> This ascent [in "Atlantis"] is Crane reaching for transcendental unity; for a few moments, something like the music of the spheres fills the cosmos, and he is in touch with the indwelling spirit of the universe. . . . The "seven oceans" (nature) and "all ships at sea" (exploring man) plight their troth and join in a joyous credo that there is a universal moral design . . . his vision of a divine concord that is, mysteriously, both immanent and transcendental . . . a crown of stars, a protective orderly universe. (pp. 140-2)

6. Closely related to Miss Slote's approach is that of Jerome Kloucek ("The Framework of Hart Crane's *The Bridge*" *Midwest Review*, vol. 2, 1960) who defers to Miss Slote's analysis of the "symbolic structure" of *The Bridge* and focuses his essay on what he finds as its coherent "narrative structure" or framework:

> Crane followed the traditional three-stage pattern of the quest. In *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (N.Y.: Meridian Books, 1956), Joseph Campbell reviews the basic features of the quest as they appear in folk tale, romance, and religious myth. . . . In the higher myths the quest involves the mystic experiences of an awakening desire to transcend the limits of one's narrow world: a purification through the annihilation of one's ego, together with the discovery within one's own unconscious depths of a new self; and the full mystic illumination, within one's consciousness, of the divine power immanent within the self and the world.

Kloucek imposes the three stage pattern (which is really little different from Miss Slote's "curves") on a supposed "sequential development" of *The Bridge*, and ends with this interesting articulation of the "full mystic illumination":

> . . . so the protagonist accepts the tragic necessity, already learned from the Daemon, for that Essence, which appears to the mystic's consciousness as the Omnipotent Void, to express itself through the loving and suffering of Existence. Thus at the close of "The Tunnel" the protagonist has returned, reborn, filled with the vision that immortality is the Now, that infinity is the Self, that the two worlds are One.

—all of which it seems one might learn without mysticism or illumination. I find Kloucek's "pattern" as unconvincing and warping (i.e. the mother in "Indiana" as "the overly possessive, ego-centered woman") as Miss Slote's, but in his emphasis on tragedy and suffering (despite "rebirth," and "ecstasy") closer to the tone of the poem.

7. A far more persuasive (for me) psychological study of Crane than any other is Wallace Fowlie's essay in *Love in Literature* (1965) to which I refer the interested reader. In passing, in this impressionistic essay, Fowlie makes a remark that comes quite close I think to describing the true tone of *The Bridge*:

> The love of the artist for his work seems to exist in the modern world when he has a sense of the irreconcilable in the other domains of love: the love of man for woman, or the love of man for God. Hence, the artist completes on one level a reconciliation between himself and the world which was impossible for him on another level.

8. Joseph Riddel's position in his "Hart Crane's Poetics of Failure" (*ELH*, vol. 33, 1966, pp. 473-496) is essentially the same as Pearce's:

> Its true subject is the viability of the poet's means, his language, by which alone he and the vision are to be fulfilled as one.

Except that Riddel finds Crane consciously a transcendentalist, who knows he is predestined to failure:

> Crane realizes . . . the difference between his words, which are the world's, and the "crystal Word," which always seems just beyond his grasp. . . . the visionary poet was destined to fail and thus was condemned again and again to "pour" forth words that hold him to the world even as they hold within themselves logos.

And we have again that visionary Crane "pursuing the dream," the frustrated romantic rather than the sophisticated Crane who never believed that the Word, the vision, could be elicited from words, and so never failed in the attempt.

9. Mr. Unterecker's biography, *Voyager: A Life of Hart Crane* (New York, 1969) appeared just before this book went to press. It contains no extended criticism of *The Bridge* but the whole is suffused with the sense of the greatness, the balance, and the coherence of the poem. All the facts we have known about Crane are in Unterecker's book and many new ones, but there is a different emphasis and orientation of these, one that is controlled by the awareness that great poems illumine the poet's biography and not the other way around.

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